

# Surviving in the Rubble: The Last Rebels of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising

**Authored by Leon Najberg and translated from Polish by Renata Fuchs, PhD., Department of Germanic Languages and Alan D. Leve Center for Jewish Studies, UCLA**

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# Introduction

**The version of the diary published in Polish in 1946** under the title “Gruzowcy” (Living and Fighting in the Rubble) by the publishing house of Centralna Żydowska Komisja Historyczna przy CK Żydów Polskich in the publication *Akcje i Wysziedlenia* (Actions and Resettlements) is complementing the unpublished diary and is marked in blue.

The following entries are added from the published version to the unpublished one:

Saturday, May 8, 1943  
Monday, May 10, 1943  
Sunday, May 16 1943  
Sunday, May 19, 1943  
Thursday, June 3, 1943  
Monday, June 14, 1943  
Saturday, July 3, 1943  
Wednesday, July 7, 1943  
Friday, August 16, 1943  
Saturday, August 17, 1943  
Saturday, September 25, 1943  
Sunday, September 26, 1943

**Authored by Leon (AKA: Marjan) Najberg (Naiberg) and translated from Polish by Renata Fuchs, PhD., Department of Germanic Languages and Alan D. Leve Center for Jewish Studies, UCLA**

## Translator’s Note

This edition of Leon Najberg’s memoirs is the first of its kind not only because it is the first translation of his writings into English, but also because it reflects each of his works separately, that is, how they were originally

created. One part constitutes Najberg's diary in its original form, including the dates. The second part is the testimony of the author as recorded by Klara Mirska, a member of the Jewish Historical Institute.

According to the note included in the file "Pamiętniki Żydów 302/113." (Jewish Diaries 303/113) at the archive of the Jewish Historical Institute, extensive fragments of the memoir encompassing the period of April 18, 1943 till September 23, 1943 were published in 1946 under the title "Gruzowcy" (Living and Fighting in the Rubble) by the publishing house of Centralna Żydowska Komisja Historyczna przy CK Żydów Polskich in the publication *Akcje i Wysziedlenia* (Actions and Resettlements 333-389). This particular version of the diary was edited to a "cleaned-up" variant and misrepresented the original message as well as distorted the unique beautiful literary – if not to say poetic – style of the author. In this translation I used the version of the diary "Gruzowcy" (Living and Fighting in the Rubble) that is in its "raw" form and was not published previously.

The book, *Ostatni Powstancy Getta* (The Last Resistance Fighters of the Ghetto) that appeared in 1993 and was published by the Jewish Historical Institute is an account that merges two sources, the over-edited version of the diary, previously used for in *Actions and Resettlements* as mentioned above, and the testimony as recorded by Klara Mirska. Both writings used to create the book *Ostatni Powstancy Getta* (The Last Rebels of the Ghetto) are not the full versions of Leon Najberg's writings since the texts used have been truncated and additionally over edited, most likely to accommodate the sentiments of the political climate at the time. This form of editing not only deleted some of the important information, but also changed the original style of the author.

This edition, however, goes back to the original sources and uses the hand-written manuscripts and at the same time attempts to preserve the unique style of the author as much as it is possible in translation.

### ***Living and Fighting in the Rubble [Gruzowcy] by Leon "Marjan" Najberg***

## Dedication

To those who raised me, who gave me the spirit of a fighter of Polish Jews and gave me strength, faith, courage, to those who fought sacrificially during

the uprising of Warsaw ghetto; to the Haszomer Hacair group in Poland—I dedicate my memories.

The author. Lodz, April 19, 1946. Najberg “Marjan” “Gruzowcy”

From April 18, 1943 till September 26, 1943

### Warsaw, May 1, 1943

Today at 1 pm the soldiers of Wehrmacht with the help of engineer Golec and his crew of workers captured all Jews, workers employed from August 28, 1942 in the labor camp in Zoliborz in Wloscianska Street 52, at 5 pm that day, 47 Jewish workers were shot dead in Palmirowskie Woods, and there buried.

Są to:

Angluster lat 19  
Brajman " 22  
Bekerman " 20  
Blustajn " 25  
Browman " 46  
Browman Sr. " 19  
Eisler " 21  
Evenlib " 21  
Lyskind " 23  
Gewiksmann " 22  
Naftaniel " 46  
Grynglas " 24  
Fortejl " 40  
Reismet " 55  
Blats & " 24  
Halpern " 36  
Fortejl Sr. " 32  
Lichtenwier " 38  
Wenthajret " 46  
Rudloff " 17  
Winograd " 22

Ganc lat. 21  
Meller " 22  
Lewnel " 24  
Reuval " 23  
Tanzel " 23  
Kotodak " 38  
Fogielman " 20  
Frydman " 18  
Herbortajn 19  
Stodolnicki A. 32  
Stodolnicki Z. 30  
Bertinawblau 24  
Goldberg 34

B. Twiba porzdk.

Snyffet lat 32  
Domanawier " 28  
Petrotajn " 27  
Petrojd " 28  
Domanawierowa lat 24  
Langwarowa " " 28  
Petrojdowa " 25  
Snyffowowa " 23

Monday, April 19, 1943

At midnight a strong banging on the door woke us up, and Mrs. Wislicki brought us some alarming news. There was a phone call from L.Skosowski to M. Rozenberg (a Jew working for Gestapo) that the ghetto was being surrounded by the Germans. It looks like the action will take place. We're getting dressed fast. In the courtyard there is lots of commotion and somber mood. People are speculating about what might happen and get lost in their premonitions. Disbelievers are mocking the tense situation. Especially the hour of 1:30 at night of April 18/19 is vivid in my memory. That night I heard for the first time the barbarous screams of a bunch of drunk cut-throats. The lookout came running, telling us that the Ukrainians were surrounding our district from the outside and inside. It is night, but here it is as if it were a July morning because over and over the whole area is being lit up by missiles, and the electric flash lights give off a lot of long rays of light as if they were searching for something. And now they are firing. Machine guns played a funeral overture accompanied by heavy automatic machine guns and jet guns. Our area is excessively lit up by rockets. The rockets and grenades fall often and densely into the courtyards of Sw. Jerska 38-36, Wolowa 2-4-6. The front windows are under fire, and the first grenade went into Kirszenbaum's apartment. I'm running to see the street. In the light of the rockets, you can see the silhouettes in helmets, positioned every 10 to 12 meters along Sw. Jerska and Walowa. There is commotion in the attic. Our boys are getting ready before leaving for the ghetto. Supposedly the ghetto will be finished during this action. It is believed that "the shops" are not in danger. But those fearless defenders of the Jewish right to live feel it's their place to defend their brothers or to die a death of honor. The boys from Z.O.B. know how to fulfill the motto, "one for all, all for one." I saw a few fighters with short and long firearms. I stopped one of them; it was Kuska. From him, I found out that they got divided into big groups. One is leaving for the ghetto, the other stays on the premises of the brush-makers factory. Kuska belongs to the first group. During our goodbyes, he said, "I'm going to perform my sacred duty, defend my brother Jews. The wicked murderers want to again snatch away 20 thousand Jews from the central ghetto. The German beast demands the Jewish blood again – but this time it will be blood for blood. I asked Kuska to take me with him, but unfortunately there are not enough weapons, and



those with naked hands must remain in the bunker. I'm angry that this action took me by surprise. All people are getting ready to go to shelters. And in the street near the wall, the music of machine guns and the noise of grenades become more frequent. It's dawning. People are in the shelters, the defenders in their positions. I'm agitated, upset; different versions of stories and suspicions are circulating. Uncertainty and fear make room for the unbreakable will to survive. The barbarians are readying for us a new satanic surprise during Passover. At 5:30 Monday morning I climbed on the roof with Ludwik Prywas in order to observe the territory. It turns out that we are surrounded by the Ukrainians, szaulisy,<sup>1</sup> paramilitary troops, and the sellouts from Polish police who are among the honorable ones among the murderers of the innocent Jewish children. Every ten meters guards are standing; at the corner of Walowa and Sw. Jerska, the machine gun is in constant use. We are surrounded and shut off. They are watching us like hawks. The silence of this historic morning is broken by the pounding of ominous steps. Through the guard post, the traitors from the Jewish police are marching in a tight formation, lead by Szmeling followed by armed police, the Ukrainians, Latvians, and the SS troops at the end. They are carrying machine guns and all kinds of automatic weapons. In a tight formation, the gang is moving forward rapidly – they are going to raid the ghetto. These are the bearers of culture, the modern Huns attacking defenseless Jewish population in broad daylight. They are going to murder totally vulnerable innocent children, rape women, and plunder property. Again the black veil will cover the ghetto, and the shroud of death will be destined this time for those poor working-class Jewish remnants. The blood shed during the first July action of 1942 has still not dried. The Jewish blood from the second January action didn't sink into the earth yet, and here the column of murderers straight from hell is already at work. With the Jewish blood, they will write, "the third action of finishing off the Jews of Warsaw." Still the walls of houses are mourning, "give us back all the innocent murdered inhabitants of ours!" Still the streams of tears are flowing and grieving the first Jewish victims. Around us, there is sadness and mourning, and the barbarians trample the ground soaked with the holy blood, marching on to fresh slaughter and playing on the strings of Jewish bodies their melodies of death. Again the Jewish blood will flow, and the Nazi henchmen will delight in the sight of the innocent blood as if it were champagne – those German instruments. And the prizes and honors will be

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<sup>1</sup> Lithuanian rifle men.

bestowed upon them, God's chosen "the bearers of culture" in the twentieth century. And the German papers will announce: "Warsaw is free of Jews – the undesired element is removed." Today I no longer go to the shelter. There is no danger here in the brush-maker district. I'm at the company's office, and everyone is crowding near the phone as the first reports from the battleground arrive. After entering the ghetto, the bandits were met with the barricades of fire, and the "courageous" bandits withdrew in panic leaving the dead and the wounded and among them the Jewish traitors of the Jewish police. Our boys dominated the territory and the ghetto is at peace. But in the morning the situation became worse, as the wicked bandits brought in the tanks. The fights are continuing. From further phone calls we find out that at Toebbens<sup>2</sup> and Schultz in Nowolipki is now totally peaceful, and Toebbens's workshop is not even surrounded. M. Rozenberg called the "god of trade," W.C. Toebbens, asking him to clarify the character of the action. Toebbens communicated that the action is being carried out in order to find weapons in the ghetto, and it will last three days. According to Toebbens, the action has nothing to do with our workshop. Toebbens instructed everyone to go back to work and carry on. To the question of Rozenberg, "why is our workshop surrounded," the reply was, "the workshop borders with the ghetto so they have to be vigilant so that nobody from the ghetto passes over to the workshop or through our territory to the Polish neighborhood." After this explanation, some people hiding in the shelters went back to their houses, the courtyard became crowded with people again. But the more careful ones stayed in the shelters. Our territory was peaceful. The news from the ghetto report about the brave relentless spirit of our heroes that fight against the overwhelming number of the murderers and against their armor and the bombs thrown on the ghetto. In the evening, we receive more news coming like a bolt of lightning, newer and clearer. One tank was forced into the silence and set on fire with some home-made bombs. Our brave defenders raised the national flags on the roof of the building in Muranowski Square. Our regional and Polish flags are flapping to show the brotherhood

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<sup>2</sup> Többens and Schultz was a Nazi German textile manufacturing conglomerate making German uniforms, socks and garments in the Warsaw Ghetto and elsewhere during the occupation of Poland in World War II. It was owned and operated by two major war profiteers: Fritz Emil Schultz from Danzig and a convicted war criminal Walter C. Többens from Hamburg.

and in the name of the fight for the common right to live, against the hated enemy. The flags symbolize and guarantee our unrelenting spirit of not giving in into the violence of the barbarians. Following the example of Bar Kokhba<sup>3</sup> and Maccabees<sup>4</sup> we will protect our symbols as long as we live. At 4:30 am the following happened: Konrad (Hauptsturmführer SS) from the Werterfassung with his entourage took a few hundreds of Jews, supposedly to work, but led them to the Umschlagplatz. At 5 am, our heroes won them back from the hands of the bandits who use different schemes and tricks to get the Jews to the factories of death. Konrad only narrowly escaped death. While the fire is exchanged, there are many dead and wounded. A group of bandits from Dzika Street is backing away upon hearing the fight. Many Jews using the commotion escaped to the Polish district. The Germans strengthened their guards. There are machine guns positioned at every thorough. Our heroes also have machine guns at Muranowski Square, Mila, Zamenhofa, and Nalewki. There is gossip making rounds that people from Werterfassung as a gesture of revenge set on fire the warehouse of Konrad in Kurza Street. After the first day of bitter fighting with the overwhelming forces of the murderers our heroes are remaining committed to the cause.

In the evening we return home. Women are fast getting the festive supper ready because it's Passover, and today is the first Cedar evening. Focused we are sitting down at the table. But this year's celebration is different, not as jubilant, and our questions are different, unlike in the previous years. Sorrow and pain emanate from the faces of all those participating, over and over again you can hear quiet weeping or a desperate scream, "why?" Why are they torturing and killing us, the wicked murderers? And I am posing the same question to myself, why? Why am I not sitting traditionally at the family table with my father, mother, siblings? And before

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<sup>3</sup> Simon Ben Kosevah was the leader of what is known as the Bar Kokhba revolt against the Roman Empire in 132 CE. He established an independent Jewish state that he ruled for three years as Nasi (Prince).

<sup>4</sup> The Maccabees were a group of Jewish rebel warriors who took control of Judea and founded the Hasmonean dynasty (167 BCE to 37 BCE) as an independent kingdom from about 110 to 63 BCE. They reasserted the Jewish religion, expanded the boundaries of Judea by conquest, and reduced the influence of Hellenism and Hellenistic Judaism.

my eyes, the images of the imminent past are appearing. I see myself at the family table, feasting, and around me my parents and siblings with radiant happy faces. The youngest brother is asking traditional questions and the father tells us Haggadah. I snapped out of my daydreaming and different questions are coming to my mind and mouth ... Ask yourself inside – when finally the wars, pogroms, and mass murders in the name of racism will be stopped? When finally the Nazi bandits will come to their senses and stop the bestial mass murders on powerless, defenseless, innocent Jewish population. When finally the streams of Jewish blood will soften up the hardened hearts of European nations. When finally the bells of the world will toll to protest – and the day will come – the day of truth: the day to pay the penalty! I try to compare our present situation with the one of the Jews in Egypt. No, it would be absurd to think – at the moment we are dealing with sophisticated, vile, inhuman Nazi goons that stop at nothing. We don't have a savior Moses who would lead us out of the ghetto to the promised land – to Palestine. There are no miracles nowadays that I could believe in. I'm thinking to my inner self. I think in extremes. At the festive table instead of toasting and yelling happily, long live! a discussion is carried on about our present circumstances. In general terms, people think the goal of the action is to annihilate all the Jews. Everyone grieves about this miserable fate. Thousands of people came from the Polish neighborhood – where they have a place in Aryan houses – to celebrate Passover in the ghetto. Also engineer Szejberg came to us, and we consult with him whether we should, already today, leave the ghetto through the sewage canals leading to the Polish district. It turns out that we are surrounded in a radius of 100 meters from the walls of the ghetto. Our trafficker knows the route that goes along Mlawska Street and the corner of Franciskanska Street, which the Ukrainians are patrolling. Tola Prywes is beside herself with despair and claims that she came to the ghetto for her death ... too bad, but if the fate wants it that way then we will perish together. I will admit to you, my dear ones, Tola continued, that I really don't think like dying being only 28 ... The candles on the table doused as if confirming the last words said ... We parted. Still today we relish the dreams in our beds that will need to be left tomorrow ...

Tuesday, April 20, 1943

And today this hellish pack of death musicians attacked the ghetto. It's quiet here. However all the people sit in their shelters. And the situation is becoming more serious. Grenades are pouring down on our district, and RPK<sup>5</sup> shots approach the courtyard closer and closer. The ghetto is fired upon from heavy weapons of different calibers. The situation is hopeless. At 12 in the afternoon, there was a call from Toebbens with the directive that, starting tomorrow, all people from the workshop need to report to the Umschlagplatz<sup>6</sup> at 10 am in order to be transported to the workshops in Trawniki and Poniatow. Warsaw till tomorrow at 12, according to the words of Toebbens, must be Judenrein.<sup>7</sup> The management of our workshop invited Toebbens with whom they consulted for a few hours. L. Prywes explained to Toebbens that no Jewish worker can trust this kind of resettlement to other workshops without any work tools and machinery. To that Toebbens replied that in Poniatow everything is waiting for the workers; new workshops where you just need to start working. L. Prywes also pointed out that the

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<sup>5</sup> Ruchnny Pulemyot Kalashnikova or "Kalashnikov hand-held machine gun" was light machine gun of Soviet design, developed by Mikhail Kalashnikov in the late 1950s, parallel with the AKM assault rifle.

<sup>6</sup> Umschlagplatz (collection point or reloading point) was a holding area set up by Nazi Germany adjacent to a railway station in occupied Poland, where the Jews from the ghetto were collected for deportation to death camps during the ghetto liquidation. During the Grossaktion Warsaw, which began on 22 July 1942, Jews were deported in crowded freight cars to Treblinka twice daily, in the early morning and in mid-afternoon. The Warsaw Umschlagplatz was constructed by fencing off a western part of the Warszawa Gdańska freight train station that was adjacent to the ghetto. Railway buildings, a former homeless shelter, and a hospital were converted into a prisoner selection facility. The rest of the train station served its regular purpose for the remainder of the inhabitants during the deportations.

<sup>7</sup> Free of Jews

workers living in the front houses cannot even enter their apartments to pack their things, like even underwear or sheets, because these apartments are constantly under fire from guns and grenades. L. Prywes suggested to Toebbens that the blockade should cease for three hours so that the workers could get ready for resettlement. Toebbens was supposed to receive a special honorarium for arranging this, but he returned from the Befehlstelle<sup>8</sup> with a refusal. This is a new trick of the murderers who want to trap us in a factory of mass murder and came up with the idea of Trawniki and Poniatow instead of Treblinka because the latter one is already well known. This piece of news spread throughout the workshop territory. People decided not to report to the Umschlagplatz. All want to rather lock themselves up in the tomb-shelters and die there instead of turning themselves in straight into the hands of the murderers. It is then the truth that it's not only about the ghetto but also the rest of 30,000 Jews, according to their statistics, but de facto 45,000.

The murderers forced their way into the former hospital "Czyste" in Gesia Street 6 and shot dead all the sick in beds. Among the dead was a well-known journalist Michal Gluski from the magazine "Echo Obcojezyczne."<sup>9</sup> A much talented man who found his death in a hospital bed. In the ghetto the fight is going on. The German bandits started using airplanes now. Having murdered all the patients at the hospital in Gesia 6, the bandits bombarded the building and its warehouse. The pilots were shooting down at the ghetto too. The murderers introduced all possible means of destruction. Our brave defenders are persisting in their positions so that the Germans need to really fight for access to each house. The entrances to the houses are barricaded so that each and every building in the ghetto is like a fortress – from the windows, the Jewish defenders are spitting fire and throwing grenades at the bandits.

Through the attics, the defenders are moving from one street to the other reclaiming endangered buildings from the bandits. The murderers started using flame throwers – the houses in the ghetto are set on fire. Pedestrian and car traffic in Bonifraterska Street (Polish district) is suspended. It is busy in the workshop territory. People take the most

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<sup>8</sup> Command post.

<sup>9</sup> A literary magazine that appeared 1935 till 1939 and discussed English, German, and French literature in a bilingual fashion.

<http://bazy.oss.wroc.pl/lwow/katalog.php?s=2&search=e%>

practical things with them to the shelters. Starting tomorrow, we're not allowed to gather in the courtyards, but need to lock ourselves in the tomb-shelters till the end of the war ... or perhaps forever ...

## Sunday, April 25, 1943

The first Jewish victims from our workshop are scattered around in the courtyards, backyard, streets, and cellars. In the cellar of the house in Walowa 2, Hoch (a German Jew), who had a shelter in this building on the fourth floor, is lying on the ground. He started to choke because of the smoke. When the first licks of fire reached Hoch's hideout, the staircase was already gone. He jumped from the fourth floor. He broke his hands and spine; on his face there's dried blood. Yesterday, he was still conscious and pulled himself into the cellar, and today he's dying ... In the courtyard of Walowa 4, there are corpses of two children and women with burned hair, mutilated faces, and bullet holes. That which lived only yesterday presents today only a pile of rags and bones ... in the cellar of Sw. Jerska 38, there are corpses of asphyxiated: engineer Trojat, Szyjka Szyjer, and two unknown remains.

## Saturday, May 8, 1943

We were able to survive only three days in the shelter of Sz. Kac, and today it was "found out" and "finished." Szymek Kac's shelter was located in Sw. Jerska 36 in the front cellars on top of which the 8-meter high rubble lay (the house was demolished in 1939). The entrance to the shelter led through the electrical transformer (that entrance was ideally masked). The shelter consisted of four cellar restrooms. There was a tunnel 18 meters long that lead to the Krasinski garden, but the exit wasn't dug through. At the shelter there was a secret electrical system, gas, running water with a pump, a wireless, a secret phone, electric stove along with the regular and gas one. The toilet was connected to the sewer system, and there were special installations that enabled good ventilation of the shelter and controlled airflow, electric fans, and a communal storage with supplies in which 400

kilos of various food articles were kept. 160 people were hiding in that shelter, among them 30 children from 1 to 16 years old.

Yesterday evening the poet W. Szlengel was still writing poetry chanting about the bravery of the Jewish fighters and lamenting the fate of the Jews. ... Dr. Krukowski (a baptized Jew) was leading a discussion about the Jewish question and complained that he figured out the situation too late. And yesterday our children came up with a new “game”—“catching the air” ... Those little babies who are forced to lie down like this all day long, and the sweat trickles down their small bodies as if someone was pouring buckets of water on them, in the evening stood in line next to the pipe that brings the air inside the shelter and started to play the catching of the air. When the stronger wave of the air was blowing, the little 6-year-old Jurek Mosenkis yelled: “I am drinking champagne.” He opened his mouth really wide and was catching the air as if he intended to store it. His face became radiant and carefree, child-like with a playful streak to it. Little Leos involved in the play even smaller Basia Kusko. Each child makes room next to the pipe for the other in a polite way and with a very serious demeanor and even more serious thought say: “Swallow lots of air, Basia, so that you won’t cry tomorrow and the Germans won’t find us!” —comments little Leos Zemsz. But it isn’t what happened. Today at 9 am, the Germans started hanging around the rubble, and at 11 am, they managed to discover “the trolley” (it is a heavy piece of steel concrete on wheels and tracks that adheres closely to the wall masking the entrance) and blow it up. Through the opening they threw in bunker-busting bombs and dragged out all the terrorized and disoriented Jews.

In the last minute, Lopata, Zemsz, and I decided that we didn’t want to go with the Germans! It’s better to die a death of honor right here. Lopata and Zemsz had weapons, I only had good intentions. With a speed of lightning, they managed to unbury the alternate exit (that led to the front stairway of that house) and after a few minutes of crawling, we found ourselves surrounded by German patrols. And again our swift orientation and bravery of my companions saved our lives. The well-aimed shots made a gap in the rows of German guards; we literally escaped to Sw. Jerska 34 and reached the second floor of the burned-out house walking over dead German bodies and under fire. When the shots were fired, the Germans lost their wits, and the Jews got away, among them Lewinson, Starowiejski, Czarnoczapka. Everyone else having been checked and interrogated about the



“Judenbunker”<sup>10</sup> was marched away from that area. Only one person, Bilauer, while asked “where are the Jews?” replied to a SS officer with an aggressive slap on his cheek adding, “hast du Juden ... Mörder!”<sup>11</sup> He was immediately murdered. In the courtyard they left smashed watches, foreign currency, crashed fountain pens, and ripped Polish money that the Jews didn’t manage to get rid of. Not too far away, you could see scattered bags, purses, wallets—the signs of the “search” ... and again one more Jewish community was extinguished. Yesterday, Szlengel had no idea that it was the last time he was writing about the heroic deeds of “szomrow.”<sup>12</sup> Most likely nobody ever will get to the manuscript. Dr. Krukowski didn’t know that he will never reach his goals that he set for himself during the Nazi slaughter ... The miserable Jewish children didn’t realize that they were playing their “game” for the last time. At 5 pm the procession of the martyrs set on their last trip. 130 people left us, among them: the Prywes family, Förster, Mosenkis, Kusko, Rozenberg, Wajnfeld. The Germans blew up the shelter.

Monday, May 10 1943

At night I established contact with the group of Mellon and was accepted to their combat group; they call themselves “Gruzowcy.”<sup>13</sup> Szerszen Lejzor is their commandant—a man who, three months ago, escaped from Treblinka, where he was hired to carry corpses from the ramp of the gas chamber to the mass graves. His assistant and alternate is Lolek (Arie from Tel-Amal<sup>14</sup> of Haszomer-Hacair), who fought in the ghetto, and after the organized fights died down, he came to us. The group consisted of 25 young Jewish men.

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<sup>10</sup> Jewish bunker.

<sup>11</sup> Here you have your Jews ... murderer!

<sup>12</sup> Translator’s note: possibly “the guardians of the ghetto.”

<sup>13</sup> Those living and fighting in the rubble.

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/tel-amal-stockade-and-tower-museum>

Their weapons are: 4 Visy, 1 Colt, 3 F.N.-ki<sup>15</sup> two Russian hand guns, and 8 grenades. The group is located in Walowa 4 on the 4<sup>th</sup> floor of the burned-out house. We get inside our “joint” by climbing a home-made cord ladder. All grocery bags and water are lifted up to the joint with the help of ropes. Our task is to defend the unarmed Jews who live in the rubble, to create self-defense, and to fight informers (kapusie).<sup>16</sup> The bottom line is not to undersell your life ... at the moment our activity is restricted to sending out patrols to the neighboring houses (we established a connection to the streets forming a square, Sw. Jerska, Bonifraterska, Walowa, and partially Franciszkanska, by breaking through the holes in the buildings) and night patrols of our own neighborhood.

Thanks to the connection we built between the buildings, we are able to employ the tactics of flexible fight in which we appear as if we had much more power to defend the block. During the day we discuss the fights of ŻOB<sup>17</sup> in the ghetto, and those conversations seem never to end. Often you can hear the following: “I would like to die like Josef Kaplan, Szmul Breslaw, Mordchaj Anielewicz—these figures became symbols for the rest of the Jews remaining alive.

We carried lively discussions on the subject of “why at the momentous climax during the fights in the ghetto, the Messiah didn’t come?” Engineer Szenfeld claimed firmly that the ghetto had such a Messiah who was knocking on the Jewish hearts—but the Jews didn’t believe his prophesies. That Messiah was—according to the words of Engineer Szenfeld—Szmul Breslaw.

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<sup>15</sup> Belgian weapons, including hand gun and a seven-shot shooter.

<sup>16</sup> “Kapus” in Polish implies a person who observes others and denounces them for gain.

<sup>17</sup> Żydowska Organizacja Bojowa (ŻOB), Jewish Combat Organisation (Yid. Yidishe Kamf Organizacye) an underground organization established in Warsaw on 28 July 1942, which undertook preparations for armed resistance in the face of deportations of ghetto residents to extermination camps. ŻOB was initiated by activists of youth organizations (Ha-Szomer ha-Cair, Dror, Akiwa) Its leaders included Mordechai Anielewicz, Icchak Cukierman, Cywia Lubetkin, Mordechaj Tenenbaum, and Aryeh Wilner.

By the way, I wanted to note that a “bazar”<sup>18</sup> was created. In the courtyard of Sw. Jerska 34 people exchange things at midnight. The best currency is a gun since its price reaches the equivalent of 10 kilos of lard, 100 cigarettes, and half liter of vodka. The second place is taken by the cigarettes, one piece for 1 kilos of barley. Money and jewelry have no value in our “market place.”

Sunday, May 16, 1943

[discrepancy: in the unpublished version as Sunday, May 19, 1943]

We call our present place a “joint.” We are on the second floor. We demolished the steps of the stairway (we climb up using a rope ladder). We are situated on the ceiling vaults of the burned-out rooms, that is, the siblings Lidzbarski, the Szarmans, the Koplows, and so-called group Klonski (this is our group). One floor below us, there is a fully preserved apartment of Tojst with all the appliances. I look at that apartment and see parallels to the present life of the Jews. Out of many families, there are only individual people that survived for now; from all streets occupied by the Jews – only individual ones; from Jewish towns – only individual ones ... from all Poland, from millions – only thousands. This life of ours is for now miraculously preserved and hanging over the ruins of all the Polish Jewry, useless, no good for nothing, and unable to live normally. Despite that, our hearts are still beating even though never again there will be joy of life in them.

After a month of darkness and the lack of air, we are relish the air, daylight, and sun. Again we are people with the sun and sky over our heads; the sun that doesn’t shine with its golden rays for everybody. In Walowa 4, lie two new corpses of women victims, and the sun is speeding up the process of decomposing while the cats and scarecrows are eating the big pieces of flesh from their faces.

In the morning, it was peaceful. The murderers arrived only at 1 pm and found the shelter in Sw. Jerska 38 (the so-called general). Having drilled

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<sup>18</sup> An open-door market where you don’t use money, but rather exchange products.

holes in the shelter, the Germans were letting nerve gas inside and this way forced the people out. After conducting the initial measures in the procedure of the murder (searches and robbery of the property), they forced people to confess where the other Jews were hiding. Out of 60 people, they chose Moniek K., whose leg was gangrenous and who looked more like a corpse (18 years old), and demanded that he would reveal where the shelters with the hiding Jews were. Moniek declared categorically that he didn't know. The murderers only waited for something like this. They used on him riding whips and led cords. He bit his teeth together and persisted in noble stubbornness so as not to betray his brothers. But the Germans have methods for everything ... one of the SS-men shot through Moniek's hand with a warning: "Wen du zeigst nicht Juden-Bunker, schiesse ich dich tot."<sup>19</sup> Resilient Moniek screamed in pain: "You murderers, I won't betray them, you can kill me!!"

Yet, that was already too much for the infuriated thugs used to getting confessions easily out of the victims. The sadists started hitting his leg with the guns so that the blood was pouring in streams, but even these torments didn't break Moniek's will. They shot through his leg with a Browning so that Moniek fell and fainted. The whips were used again ... The murderers didn't let go of their victim, and similarly to the way women do the wash by beating dirty laundry, they were beating Moniek. The poor victim, knowing that the bunker "Leonek" in Walowa 2 was already once uncovered – in order to avoid beating – gave the address to the murderers hoping that no one alive is there. Yet from that bunker the murderers dragged out 12 people who came to hide and spend the night. They finished off Moniek after he confessed. The newly-catched ones were ordered into a single file and marched, as one of the bandits ironically said to an old woman, (to work): "Ihr alle bekommt ein Arbeit."<sup>20</sup> As of today the following people left us among others: the Fersters, the Mosenkis, the Manhajmers, Glikier, the Goldcwajgs, the Bachmajers, the Kranc, Janowski, a child, Nudelman with Rysio, N. Prywes with the family, and Leonek with the family. Those shot on the spot were 96-year-old Kramarc, 74-year-old limp Jakubowska, Moniek, and the corpse unknown to me. In the courtyard of Sw.

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<sup>19</sup> If you don't show us the bunker of the Jews, I will shoot you dead.

<sup>20</sup> You all will get a job.

Jerska 38, the suitcases, bags, backpacks, wallets, and documents of the new victims are lying around. The remains of the search that took place here.

Sunday, May 19, 1943

We call our present place a “joint.” We are on the second floor. We broke up the steps of the stairway (we climb using a rope ladder). We are located on the ceiling vaults of the burned out rooms, that is, the siblings Lidzbarski, the Szarmans, the Koplows, and so-called group Klonski – this is our group. One floor above us, there is a completely preserved apartment of Tojst totally furnished. I look at that apartment and see parallels to the present life of the Jews. Out of many families, there are only individual people that survived for now; from all streets occupied by the Jews – only individual ones; from Jewish towns – only individual ones ... from all Poland, from millions – only thousands. This life of ours is for now miraculously preserved and hanging over the ruins of all the Polish Jewry, useless, no good for nothing, and unable to live normally. Nevertheless our hearts are still beating even though never again there will be joy of life in them.

After a month of darkness and the lack of air, we are delighting in the air, daylight, and sun. Again we are people with the sun and sky over our heads; the sun that doesn't shine with its golden rays for everybody. In Walowa 4, lie two new corpses of women victims, and the sun is speeding up the process of decomposing while the cats and scarecrows are eating the big pieces of flesh from their faces. In the morning, it was peaceful. The murderers arrived only at 1 pm and found the shelter in Sw. Jerska 38 (the so-called general). Having drilled holes in the shelter, the Germans were letting nerve gas inside and this way forced the people out. Having conducted the initial steps in the procedure of the murder (searches and robbery of the property), they forced people to confess where the other Jews were hiding. Out of 60 people, they chose Moniek K., whose leg was gangrenous and who looked more like a corpse (18 years old), and demanded that he would reveal where the shelters with the hiding Jews were. Moniek declared categorically that he didn't know. The murderers only waited for something like this. They used on him riding whips and led cords. He bit his teeth together and persisted in noble stubbornness so as not to betray his brothers. But the Germans have methods for everything ... one of the SS-men shot through Moniek's hand with a warning: “Wen du zeigst

nicht Juden-Bunker, schiesse ich dich tot.”<sup>21</sup> Resilient Moniek screamed in pain: “You murderers, I won’t betray them, you can kill me!!” But that was already too much for the infuriated thugs used to getting confessions easily out of the victims. The sadists started hitting his leg with the guns so that the blood was pouring in streams, but even these torments didn’t break Moniek’s will. They shot through his leg with a Browning so that Moniek fell and fainted. The whips were used again ... The murderers didn’t let go of their victim, and similarly to the way women do the wash by beating dirty laundry, they were beating Moniek. The poor victim, knowing that the bunker “Leonek” in Walowa 2 was already once uncovered – in order to avoid beating – gave the address to the murderers hoping that no one alive is there. Yet from that bunker the murderers dragged out 12 people who came to hide and spend the night. They finished off Moniek after he confessed. The newly-catched ones were ordered into a single file and marched, as one of the bandits ironically said to an old woman, (to work): “Ihr alle bekommt ein Arbeit.”<sup>22</sup> As of today the following people left us among others: the Fersters, the Mosenkis, the Manhajmers, Glikier, the Goldcwajgs, the Bachmajers, the Kranc, Janowski, a child, Nudelman with Rysio, N. Prywes with the family, and Leonek with the family. Those shot on the spot were 96-year-old Kramarc, 74-year-old limp Jakubowska, Moniek, and the corpse unknown to me. In the courtyard of Sw. Jerska 38, the suitcases, bags, backpacks, wallets, and documents of the new victims are lying around. The remains of the search that took here place.

### Conflict:

**Sunday, May 19, 1943 is listed as Sunday in the unpublished version and as Wednesday in the published version—these are different entries, not the same text. This entry is not to be found in the unpublished version [Sroda, 19 V, 1945]**

Wednesday, May 19, 1943

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<sup>21</sup> If you don’t show us the bunker of the Jews, I will shoot you dead.

<sup>22</sup> You all will get a job.

We decided to get into contact with PPR<sup>23</sup> (from the Polish district) so that they could help us to get out of the ghetto and join the partisans (Engineer Goldman knew the passwords). A group of our “gruzowcy”<sup>24</sup> consisting of eight people went into the terrain to scout around. The location for our reconnaissance was the “wild terrain” or to be more precise, the corner of Gesia and Nalewki streets up to the telephone distribution box. We have handguns, a few German grenades, and a telephone (F. Rozenberg rescued it from a burning house). Contrary to our expectations, we ran into a German night patrol. Mellon and Lolek aimed at the Germans. They could hear wild screams of one of them, “Hans ich bin verwundet.”<sup>25</sup> After a few more shots, another murderer fell down like a log of wood. The reflectors from the tower in Nalweka Street started searching, and RKM’s<sup>26</sup> were “scorching” us. However, we retreated fast to the house at Nalewki 34 and emerged suddenly at Franciszkanska. The German RKM fell silent, and Hans was taking care of his comrade’s wounds. The reflector from the watchtower at Nalewki lit up that spot. Arie decided to use a grenade and took lives of two murderers. Yes, the night belongs to us, and we won’t let this victory be ripped away from us! Our spoils were a machine gun, a map of the ghetto, and identification papers issued for Maks Rohl. From our modest reserves of ammunition, we lost 9 bullets and 2 grenades. The plan of getting into contact with the Polish district was postponed.

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<sup>23</sup> The People's Army (Armia Ludowa, AL) was a communist partisan formed by the communist Polish Workers' Party (PPR) during World War II. Its goals were to fight against Nazi Germans in occupied Poland, support the Soviet military against the German forces, and to assist in the creation of a pro-Soviet Union communist government in Poland. It was one of the military resistance organizations that refused to join the structures of the Polish Underground State or its military arm, the Home Army.

<sup>24</sup> People living and fighting in the rubble.

<sup>25</sup> Hans, I’ve been wounded.

<sup>26</sup> Machine guns.

Wednesday, May 26, 1943

All throughout the day, there was unrest in our district, as the sprayers and machine guns were making noise and the bandits in the courtyard were running back and forth like mad. At 7 pm one could hear Jewish screams. A group of German bandits entered the courtyard in Walowa 4 accompanied by rambunctious, bloody Polish traitors of the Polish police who were escorting new Jewish victims. The bandits were leading five men to the middle of the courtyard. The courtyard was surrounded by the SS-men with the sprayers. After a while the Polish bastards opened fire from the Browning guns towards the innocent Jewish victims. And so as if it were not enough that the victims are bleeding and falling down in horrible agony ... this is not enough for the wild animals. An SS-officer approaches the victims and kicks each victim in the face and then finishes them with reprimand. Each corps gets additionally a bullet in the head. After five minutes the bandits bring in another five men. The Polish policemen throw themselves on the disoriented and terrorized and proceed with the aforementioned ritual of death. Then the bandits bring in the last three Jewish victims. I recognized them as Ajzenberg, Wajnberg, and Fugman. Those men were proceeding calmly, reasonable and dispirited, to their death. When Fugman noticed aimed at them with the Browning in the hands of the Polish policemen, he threw his last words at them: "Collaborators, I will be revenged!!!" Steal barrels in the hands of the beasts let out the bullets to the yet alive. The SS-men gifted the victims with an additional shot in the head ceremony. Their leader asked: "Ob diese ganze Scheisse ist kaputt?"<sup>27</sup> When he received the affirmative reply, he marched away with his troop. After that you could hear for over half an hour the squealing of the children, the lament of the women, and the curses in Yiddish directed toward the murderers. The hellish music of machine guns, hand-held guns and sprayers started anew. Very close to us you could hear grinding metal and supernatural scream of women ... that evening the bandits were leaving the place of slaughter drunk with their success singing the hymn of the murderers: "Wir wollen nicht, wir brauchen nicht kein Juden-Republik!"<sup>28</sup> We went to the place of that calamity. It

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<sup>27</sup> Whether this shit is broken/dead.

<sup>28</sup> We don't want. We don't need any Jewish republic.



turned out that today they found out the bunker of the “Drykiers” where 62 people were hiding. In Walowa 62 we chanced upon Rapaport who survived the bunker action. Rapaport was covered with sand under cots. The bandits arrived at 10 am and entered the bunker from Walowa 2 where the entrance to the tunnel was located which led to the Nalweki 14, “wild territory.” Having drilled holes in the cellar’s floor, the bandits gassed the inside. No Jews were leaving, but the people were suffocating. The bandits pull out a big chunk of the wall and entered the bunker. Guns in their hands, they chased the Jews out of the bunker, and they beat up those who were resisting till they lost consciousness. After that they search the bunker and stole the valuables. Rapaport took us to Walowa 2. In front of my eyes appeared a sight of the savagery and sadism of brutal murder. Women, girls, and children lay soaking in their own blood near the garbage container positioned against the wall of the house in Sw. Jerska 38. As if they were an abandoned pile of unwanted junk, a heap of rags ... But these tangled up and bound together legs point to the fact that they just lived. The corpses lie close together. A pyramid of 42 corpses. In the light of the flashlights, we recognize some of the faces. Hot blood is still oozing from these corpses, from their stomachs, hands, legs, breasts, and heads. Some of the victims have bands over their eyes. We are looking at this horrible sight, and from our eyes come streams of tears. Quietly in Yiddish, we talk about yet another link in a chain of the Polish-German atrocities. Something is moving among the corpses ... someone is trying to get up. We run up to the person. A small 10-year-old girl with her eyes covered with a kerchief speaks to us in Yiddish: “Jews, don’t be afraid. Give us some water.” And a moment later, she picks up from the ground a 5-year-old kid and pointing to it says: “she also. And she’s not even wounded.” After quenching her thirst, she says eagerly: “I’m Irka Rubinstein, and this girl is Halinka Ajzenberg.” Irka is telling us her experiences of the day. “The Germans, after taking us out of the bunker, lined up everyone in Walowa 2. Right away they began with the murder routine, that is, naked search, robbing of the valuables (watches, jewelry, cash, etc.). My older sister didn’t let them take off her clothes so that the Germans beat her with the whips and tore the clothes off of her. We all were forced to stand there naked from 3 pm till 6:30 pm. One of the SS-men told us that we will be shot. Only those who are willing to show where other Jews are hiding will be kept alive and will work at the Befehlstelle. The one who volunteered for the job was Mundeck Furman from Walowa 2 A whom the Germans escorted away immediately. Then they had all men gather in the

street. Our mothers covered our eyes and their own eyes. Our mothers told us that when they begin to shoot we need to fall to the ground. Then they took us from the courtyard into the corridor from where they lead us by fives. I went with my mom who was holding my hand. I heard the noise of shots behind me, fell, and was pinned by someone's heavy weight. Blood was running down my face. I didn't know whether I was wounded or dying. My heart was beating, and in my head was chaos, darkness, something was cracking in my ears, and the heavy load was pressing me down. The Germans kept kicking us, and those who were screaming or moving were shot although they shot also the corpses with their guns. I didn't dare to breath and was quiet. After some time, I heard them singing as they were leaving ... I lay there for a bit longer, removed the dead body that was over me, and took off the kerchief from my eyes. Then I discovered that the corps that covered me was my mother – Irka ended with a cry – it was her blood that was pouring all over me. My mommy doesn't live any longer. I kissed her body getting cold and started searching among the dead. I thought that maybe my sister survived just the way I did. But they all were already dead. I stepped on the leg of Halinka Ajzenberg, and she moved ... I touched her pulse and was able to feel it. I thought that Halinka was only wounded and she just fainted ... I removed the corpse from her, and it turned out it was her mother ... I uncovered Halinka's eyes and brought her some water from the bunker in order to revive her. Suddenly I heard footsteps and we lay ourselves down among the corpses pretending to be dead. I thought the murderers were returning. I stopped breathing and listened for the shots to be fired. Then I heard Yiddish being spoken, and I knew you are our friends – Irka ends. But after a moment she asks: "I beg you, tell us where the murderers took our fathers?" And the little Halinka was standing next to her crying and monotonously repeating: "my mommy doesn't live anymore, and the Germans took away my daddy from the bunker. I don't want to live." It was almost impossible to cry about this kind of bestiality represented by the symbol of the white eagle and the swastika. In the courtyard, 42 people were eternally resting, Jewish human beings. 42 women extinguished, their lives blown out like candles. 42 women drowned in their own blood. In the courtyard of Walowa 2 you could see the bushes, flowers, and buds intertwining with each other ... and the pyramid made up of women's bodies, their corpses that I will never forget. But in the jungle of the ghetto the way of life is too harsh – don't despair, don't be too emotional, don't go to pieces – this was required in the moment. Our conscience dictated that we needed

to care for the miraculously saved children. In the middle of the courtyard of Walowa 2 there are 13 cut-down oaks lying around ... 13 men who had entered here an hour ago – never to leave here again ... all of them have clenched fists, expression of despair on their faces covered with blood, and bodies full of bullet holes plus additional bullets in their heads. Some of them are positioned with the faces down to earth, as if they were sleeping, but a big puddle of blood reveals that they drowned – they are not alive. One of them only, Ajzenberg, calls out from time to time: “Zemsz, save me!” and then he falls asleep. After examining Ajzenberg, the doctor announced that under these circumstances, it would be impossible to save him. Klonski finished off Ajzenberg. This was the last radical method so that he wouldn’t reveal anything about the bunkers unconsciously and to shorten his suffering. The surviving children, you ask about your parents – look, it is there where they are lying ... this is how the united Polish-German gang functions!

58 human beings were executed through a default judgment because they were born Jewish. I turned already into a piece of stone. Before the war, the heart would be exploding with pain. At the present time, I’m on a rollercoaster of emotions with no respite, with no time to rest, as I’m trying to ignore that others are drowning and fighting against this thunderstorm so that it wouldn’t wash me down and off from the surface of life. And this delicate instrument, the heart, is slowly dying piece by piece. Only my gaze is obstinate, and the brain registers everything, and the logic signals, look! This is how you will look, just like them—the corpses ... this is the end that awaits you as you are a Jew too ... I’m trying to build my inner armor, not to think, not to look, all I want is to last. I want to survive and to be able to tell about what I had seen. But then again the visions of the horrific corpses reappear. The corpses burned, stabbed, squished under an army tank track with its imprints, buried under the rubble, gassed, beaten to death with sticks, torn to pieces by grenades, bodies changed into the target for bullets, whipped, smoked, in agony of terrible suffering in the caves of the shelters, suffocated in the cattle cars, starved to death. The corpses of the Jewish babies that the barbarians split in half by hitting them against the walls, the corpses of those who jumped from the burning buildings to their death and those who jumped off the cattle cars on their way to the sites of execution who found their double death with their broken, hands, legs, spines. The daughters of Zion who forbade the barbarians to defile their bodies. And the heroic bodies

of the Jewish defenders who went down the path of “Kiddush-Hashem.”<sup>29</sup> Millions appear and beg for revenge of their innocent blood! Hundred of thousands for their lost, defiled, raped, caught in deceit in a bestial manner and murdered youth. Tens of thousands of babies abducted from their mothers with smashed skulls at the Umschlagplatz where their blood and brains were spilled all over the ground thus marking it forever as the site of murder ... I see you Jewish babies with your mouth contorted, fists clenched, grimace of pain, and silent despair, how you are dying in unprecedented agony. I know that you, Jewish children, didn't cause any of that, neither revolution nor contra-revolution, but you perished nevertheless. Why?

Thursday, May 27, 1943

It wasn't enough for the fellow citizens, our brave seconds of the murder, the Polish police – after yesterday's murder, today they arrived to do the looting. The police from the precinct 17 in Warsaw in Walowa, and from the still-warm corpses of the bunker “Drykier” they removed all the clothing and shoes, leaving the “carriage” naked. They did the same to the corpses of women in Walowa 2. The robbers packed the clothing into sacks and at 5 am carried them away into the Polish district. While the whole procedure of taking the clothes off, the corpses were thrown around like animal carcasses. 25 Polish hyenas fully equipped with different automatic weapons and grenades were employed for this sacrilege.

Thursday, June 3, 1943

Our troop underwent a combat initiation today. At 10 am, the Germans managed to enter undetected our building in Walowa 4 from Sw. Jerska 38 (we called the building as “hotel” because there about 150 Jews were

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<sup>29</sup> It is a precept of Judaism that includes sanctification of the name of God by being holy. Any action by a Jew that brings honor, respect, and glory to God is considered to be sanctification of his name while any action that disgraces, harms, or shames God's name is regarded as a chillul Hashem (desecration of the Name).

hiding). To the accompaniment of a vigorous music coming from the garden of Krasinski, the Ukrainian and the Wehrmacht soldiers marched to the third floor whistling to themselves “Horst-Wessel.”<sup>30</sup> When they entered the burned rooms, they saw messed-up beds, left-behind backpacks, and small concealed shooting holes ... Our group succeeded in evacuating to Sw. Jerska 34 taking only some of the Jews. However, several families were left in the burned rooms of that house, scattered around different levels, and tried to hide there temporarily. The Germans opened fire from their nozzles and screamed, “Alle Jude heraus.”<sup>31</sup> Nobody appeared. Suddenly we saw an opening leading to Sw. Jerska 34 (the house to which we evacuated) and began approaching us—expecting nothing. Our guys held their breath and were ready to shoot. When the aggressors got very close, a series of shots erupted; three of them got smashed right into the ceiling of the house. Another group of three following and giving them cover resigned. The temporary success was wonderful. But after an hour, the whole troop of the aggressors consisting of about 150 soldiers armed to the teeth started the formal attack. We were fighting back firing single shots and throwing grenades that from time to time were falling into the courtyard of Walowa 4. The German sappers crept into the cellars of the house and used dynamite to blow up the main front wall thus getting access to a shooting location downstairs far away from us. The Germans started shooting at us from different directions. The barrage of fire enveloped us like an avalanche. Czarnoczapka and Szerman got wounded. But our group kept its cool.

Further developments were proceeding in a speed of light. With the help of ladders, the Germans managed to get into the “Hotel.” The ammunition was ending. The decision was made to retreat. We ran away to Franciszkanska Street using the openings in the wall prepared earlier. The Germans were also on guard here. Shooting back heavily, we were able to scatter ourselves around the “wild terrain.” In the evening, after we got back together, it turned out that Pierocki died in the fight. The Germans took away about 70 people from the house in Walowa 4, among them, the family Nysenholc, Szwarc, Szerman, Wajdenfeld, Halinka Ajzenberg, and Irka Rubinsztejn; wounded women Czarnoczapka and Szerman were finished off by the Germans. The group of the new victims was shot dead today at the

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<sup>30</sup> Horst Wessel Lied: <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/horst-wessel>

<sup>31</sup> All the Jews, come out!

Muranowski Square. Out of that group, 14-year-old Heniek Szerman returned albeit with 5 shot wounds; he lived through the execution and crawled to us after the executioners left. There are no chances to keep him alive.

At midnight we found a new "joint" in Nalewka 27 in the courtyard of a burned down house. Starting tomorrow, we will work on the security measures. We were successful in establishing contacts with the group of Zachariasz that is located in Nalewka 34 at the joint there. From them we found out that their commandant Zachariasz together with Lopata went to Mylna Street in order to find contacts with the Aryan side, and there they died. The group of Zachariasz is looking into possibilities of getting out to the Aryan side through the canals. We set up a password and intend to be in continuous contact. Over our joint in the attic there are 9 deteriorating corpses. Who were those people? Where do they come from? For now, it's a puzzle for us.

Monday, June 7, 1943

From 5 till 7 in the evening I had a lookout duty observing the fourth courtyard at Nalewki 27. Suddenly I hear the falling down debris under quiet ascending footsteps. Even before I managed to share my observations, some "ghost" covered in blood enters the room. The face covered with dried blood, face and the clothing also soaked with blood. I cannot see his eyes, and his right hand is hanging lifeless and battered, and the whole figure presents a sight of the clobbered death ... "The ghost" immediately spits out the words, "you know guys, I didn't betray you, so if it's possible help me or just finish me off this very minute to end my suffering," and then he faints. Immediately Miss Kanak revived him, washed, disinfected, and wrapped up his wounds (she was a paramedic at the hospital in Czysta). Only then she realized it was Lolek who left Lichow to get to the Aryan side (Lolek-Arie from Gduduo Tefral in Warsaw). When Lolek came to, he was given some homemade noodles with sugar and well water or rather with sand because this is what our water was like, mud. He rested a bit and told us that he was being executed together with the girl Kobryner in Zamenhof 13 and that she no longer lives, but he pretended to be a corpse, and when the bandits left he crawled to us repeating, "I cannot die, I have to warn you that a brother is at the Befehlstelle, I know he has my character but while being interrogated he might give in and when they torture him with cruelty, he might betray you! Leave here this very minute! On the way here from Zamehof, there are

many traces of blood. Save your lives. Leave me here because the bandits can come here any time.” We put Lolek on the bedding and left him some sugar, noodles, and water and at 5:45 pm 9 people went down quietly to the wall of the other building next to which entrance was an opening as large as 100 by 45 cm through which they slipped to the property in Gesia Square 5 and from there to the cellar in Gesia 7 where they waited till 10 at night. For the first time since seven weeks I went into the courtyard during the day and crossed the street; our hearts were pounding because of anxiety and fear that the bandits might see us and can start shooting at us. But still, mobilized by the fear itself we ultimately didn’t pay attention to that. Sitting in a cellar, we were shivering under the influence of this new development and waiting for 10 in the evening in order to get back again to “Heros.” But while waiting it seems that the time were dragging on with a hellish slowness. Our throats were burning with thirst, and we became sleepy, tired, resigned, and ready for anything. In order to hear better, we were holding our breath. It seemed as if there were nine corpses lying in that cellar, and only the beating of our hearts pointed to the fact that we were indeed alive. At some point we heard, “Wir wollen nicht, wir brauchen nicht”<sup>32</sup> etc. which was a sign for us that the bandits were done for the day with “their work,” that all the murders were committed, and so this day we still count ourselves among the living. Now we were discussing Lolek while whispering. Miss Kanal claims that Lolek won’t live long because he was hit four times by the bullets: one time in the hand, one time in his stomach, one time in his breast, and in his neck. It took us half an hour to discuss the situation in lowered voices. We returned to the joint and found out that Lolek was feeling better and after drinking some tea he was able to tell us more of the story: From the “wild territory” they left on Saturday night, at the corner of Smocza and Gesia, through a manhole opened by an Aryan man-guide, and they were walking for about 2.5 hours in the stinking sewage canals up to their ankles. At some places the canals were so muddy that they needed to crawl. On Sunday at 4:30 in the morning the Aryan lead them into a dead end street near a Protestant cemetery. Everyone entered the cemetery. Six of the people took trams to their destinations right away. Sz. Meller went with the guide and bought food for the whole day because in the evening it is better to go places in the Polish neighborhood. Lolek and his brother were supposed to wait for Meller who intended to look for a place to stay for his parents and wanted to

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<sup>32</sup> We don’t want to. We don’t need to.

return to the ghetto in order to get more Jews out with the help of the Aryan. At 6 am, some thugs came to the cemetery and noticed a “Moszek”<sup>33</sup> and demanded to be bribed so that Lolek and his brother loaded the guns and replied that all they’ll get ... is a bullet each! They scared off the thugs and went to the Jewish cemetery and hid in the rabbinical grotto. Hours passed, and the cemetery was quiet and empty. They hid their weapons under the jackets and fell asleep after 32 hours of being agitated and tired. Suddenly a scream, “Hände hoch!”<sup>34</sup> woke them up, and they saw the guns aimed at them while one of the SS-men approached them so that they were disarmed before they even noticed. When they left the grotto, they noticed the same thugs and four SS-men and thought they would drop dead at the Jewish cemetery. But they were not destined to end their lives in such a noble way. They were taken to the Befehlstelle, and this is where their pre-death hell began. On the way, Lolek and his brother discussed and coordinated their testimony and swore not to betray anyone. The SS-men submitted a report about apprehending the Jews in the Polish neighborhood, and as a proof of their criminal activity they put on the table the two loaded riffles ready to be used on them by the Jews. The investigation began. Everyone was sent to their cells first and then was interrogated individually. Lolek was asked how he managed to get to the cemetery, and he replied that he jumped over the wall. Where did he get his weapon? He took it from a dead person in the ghetto. And why did he bring it to the Polish neighborhood? In order to be able to protect himself from the Poles who might attack him. Then the questions followed about the bunker from which he came. And, where are the Jews? How many Jews are still there? Lolek gave evasive answers. They started to slap his face hard and whip his whole body till he fainted. He came to in the dark cell where he was alone, and only a multitude of bugs was crawling all over his body. An hour has passed. An SS-man arrived and explained that the only way he will be able to survive while working under good conditions and being fed if he will reveal the bunker with the Jews. He offered him cigarettes, took him by the hand, lead him to a square Lazna 101 with the barracks housing 60 Jews, took him inside one of the barracks where he got his dinner in the kitchen and saw people from various bunkers and concluded that from each group destined for the

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<sup>33</sup> Jew

<sup>34</sup> Hands up!



execution the Germans were able to coerced some victims into confession. In that barrack, there was a canteen with baking goods and sweets. Among those Jews he recognized Maniek from Szomer, Miss Halina Szpirow, and Tischler. As they were leaving the barrack, the SS-man explained to Lolek all the possibilities as a lucky Jew working for the SS and having a guarantee of being able to survive. The SS-man emphasized that Lolek can receive an ID of life issued by Governor Frank. But only if he can work as informant, he can receive these privileges. The SS-man also underlined that if Lolek insists on his ridiculous testimony, he will be shot tonight. After that he asked about Lolek's last wish. Lolek asked for a change of cell to a one with a window, and he wanted to say goodbye to his brother. They gave him a new cell but didn't allow him to see his brother. On Sunday at 6 am Lolek was transferred to a new cell and received a pack of cigarettes. All day long it was peaceful in his cell. At 9 pm a SS-man brought him supper and asked him whether he was ready to confess. Lolek told him that he already did that once, and he has nothing new to add. Upon receiving such reply, the SS-man cursed: "Verfluchter Jude!"<sup>35</sup> took away the food, and sent Lolek to a bunker. After an hour stay in the bunker, they took Lolek to an office where two SS-men whipped him alternating in the torture. When Lolek fainted to the ground, they revived him to begin the torture anew. This investigation lasted an hour. The temptation was very strong, but his will was not to be broken – to die as a quiet unknown Jew, but don't reveal anything about the brothers. After the investigation ended, Brandt (Hauptsturmführer) declared: "Heute wirst du getötet!"<sup>36</sup> This wasn't any news for Lolek because he had been dealing with death for the last 11 months or even 4 years since the Nazis occupied Poland. It was more a matter of it being postponed. While he was waiting the hours were moving slowly. The whole night, he spent without falling asleep waiting for his sentence – the wounds inflicted upon him with the whip were burning mercilessly. He was racking his brain about the pre-death sadism the bandits will deliver to him. The night passed, the morning, the noon, the thirst became unbearable and so did the hunger in addition to waiting for his death. At 4:50 pm the bandits let Lolek out of the bunker. Lolek was convinced that in a bit his heart will be shot through with a series of bullets coming suddenly. Lolek was lead to the courtyard where two cars were

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<sup>35</sup> You damned Jew!

<sup>36</sup> Today you will be killed!

parked. Lolek got into the one of them and next to him Miss Kobryner was ordered to sit, and the escort of four SS-men went with them in the same car. In the other car was Hauptsturmführer Brandt and Konrad with two SS-men. The cars started rolling. Miss Kobryner's face was massacred from tormenting, and her hands were butchered slumping as if two pieces of meat and bones. Miss Kobryner whispered: "I couldn't bear it any longer and told them which sewer manhole I used for coming and leaving, and now they are taking us so that I can show them exactly which spot that is." They didn't talk to each other because the whips of the SS-men were already used. The cars pulled up to the manhole in Okopowa Street. SS-men made some notes, and the cars moved on into the ghetto. At the corner of Gesia and Smocza they also checked a canal entrance, made a note, and the car with Brandt and Konrad left while the car in which Lolek and Miss Kobryner sat (a dentist) pulled up in Zamenhofa 13. Here it stopped. Lolek and Miss Kobryner received an order to look for a cable in the courtyard. When they entered the gate, they heard gunshots and fell bleeding. Miss Kobryner screamed terribly, the SS-man shot at her seven times. Lolek was conscious but was pretending to be a corpse. Regardless of that the SS-man finished him off with two bullets one got stuck in his chest while the other one went through his right hand that he was holding over his stomach and went inside his stomach. However Lolek didn't lose his consciousness. When he heard leaving cars of the bandits, he got up and checked on Miss Kobryner to confirm her death and from Zamenhofa 13 made it to Zamenhofa 24 where in the third courtyard is punctured wall that is an entrance to Nalewki 27. This way Lolek was able to get to us before he lost all his blood. Lolek believed in the strong character of his brother, but because the bandits haven't shot him yet he advises us to leave the joint for a few days. At 2 am we left the "wild territory" transferring to "Heres." On our way we heard the screams of Miss Kobryner who was wandering around the great Jewish cemetery of the former ghetto.

Monday, June 14, 1943

We ran out of ammunition and weapons, but we found out that in Franciszkanska 22 there is a shelter called "Haimanowcow" who died gassed by phosgene. After two hours of strained work, we dug a passage and crawled inside the shelter. Here we encountered a horrible stench of dead

bodies covered in a swarm of flies. In a dim light we see countless totally decomposing bodies bound together. These are nameless heroes who chose death in the shelter, rather than giving themselves up into the hands of the Germans. We cover our mouths and noses with handkerchieves and stay put for a while in silent pain. In the passageway, there is a heap of bodies that are drenched in a sticky puddle of solidified blood and scraps of meat. There is no way to recognize their faces. It is a terrorizing sight—a mass grave—the shelter. But we didn't come here to despair: we need weapons!

You, the soldier of the Home Army!<sup>37</sup> How happy you are to have weapons ... You are able to respond with violence to the violence! Not like us, who have the best intentions, possibilities, and fighting spirit. Yet, we lack weapons and ammunition! ... We the Jews, the sons of Warsaw beg you to give us weapons and ammunition in order to continue the fight against the Germans. This kind of resolution was affirmed by the Jewish youth when about 500 of them gathered at night in Sw. Jerska 34.

It doesn't matter that people fainted simply because of the odor coming from the decomposing corpses, that we were exhausted. At 3 am we looked through 45 corpses and gathered our bounty of: 3 Visy, 1 F.N., and 7 packs of ammunition. At dawn there was the swearing in ceremony of the new fighters who received the weapons. I was one of them. We swore not to part with our weapons till our death.

## Saturday, July 3, 1943

At 5 am I was woken up by the sounds of shooting and exploding grenades. The German bearers of death came to harvest a bloody crop. Quick orders, the clank of guns being loaded, and the expression of our faces give witness to our readiness to fight. The whooshing bullets, the uproar of the grenades, and German screams proclaim that the fight started. Our lookouts are reporting that Gesia and Nalewki streets are surrounded by powerful German troops. And thus we are closed off from both sides. Only Zamenhof Street is an option for a retreat. But there wasn't an order yet. A fountain of fire is pouring over us as if coming out of a volcano crater. The Germans tried

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<sup>37</sup> <https://www.ushmm.org/learn/students/learning-materials-and-resources/poles-victims-of-the-nazi-era/polish-resistance-and-conclusions>

to approach our joint several times, but every time a grenade and some shots sufficed for the “Herrenvolk”<sup>38</sup> to scatter around. At 10 pm Klonski noticed that a German bomb squad was getting the dynamite ready to blow us up. Then we were ordered to retreat to Zamenhofa Street. Calm and keeping order, we crawled through a chain of openings of the burn-down houses making acrobatic moves till we got to Zamenhofa 24. Moving in a single file, we got to the street. We planned to get to Pawia Street. When the front of our procession reached Pawia Street—R.K.M.’s started playing from the towers of Pawiak, and Janowski fell wounded. We moved back towards Gesia. And here the Germans met us with a prohibitive fire. The girl Kanal fell. We found ourselves trapped. Lolek ordered us to move back to Zamenhofa 24 to face our last fight. We took our positions in the courtyard behind the broken wall. After a few minutes the street was filled with people and the murderers entered the courtyard shooting into all possible directions. The comrades-in-arm let them approach very close. A grenade thrown by Mosze Halbersztadt turned two enemy soldiers into a bloody pulp. An exchange of shots began. Our ammunition was ending. The Germans were pouring fire over our courtyard from the street. Our defeat was certain. The other guys decided to either get through or die. Mosze Halbersztadt and Lolek Trynkiert sneaked up to the gate and threw some grenades. The Germans lost their heads and ran away. That moment was enough to run along Pawia through Zamenhofa 13 to Gesia. But not everyone was supposed to survive. In the courtyard of Gesia 13, Lolek, Mosze Halbersztadt, Trynkiert, Irena Rozenberg, and Lipski hid themselves, and the Germans caught them there. They started to fight, but after using all the ammunition—fell. The courtyard Zamenhofa 13 is their common graveyard.

The Germans entered our joint in Nalewki 27 and set all our clothing on fire along with the provisions and beds. The fire is burning and the darkness of the ghetto is lit up. People are dying and there is almost no ammunition. We have neither food nor water ... Should we go on? But how?

At night we went to the brush maker district; the Germans are looting there constantly. They know there every nook and cranny. I found out that Szladkowski and Rudy Jozek (the doorman at Sw. Jerska 19) are supposed to be in our vicinity again. For taking people out from here to the “paradise” those traffickers take 15,000 zlotys per “head.” Our group doesn’t dare

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<sup>38</sup> Master race.

dream about this because we don't have such a sum of money so that everyone could get out. The one who has such amount of money, won't go alone because we are bound in league by blood spilled together.

The last technical phase of the ghetto blockade is finished by the Germans (according to them). Water is cut off from the ghetto. The same goes for the electricity. Now the murderers came up with yet another demonic idea; because you cannot disconnect gas, they let the water run through the gas pipes. The result is such that the water is poisoned, and there is no gas. Luckily there are still good professionals among us. H. Zemsz with the whole group of workers are digging a tunnel under the water main located under the street. Besides that, they're getting into the cable from which we will have electricity. Our group with Szerszen got situated at Nalewki 25-23 in the fourth courtyard on the 4<sup>th</sup> floor. Perhaps this joint will be luckier.

Saturday, June 26, 1943

After the consultation during the day, we decided to divide into two groups. One of them went to Schultz and small Toebens – this is a square made out of the streets Nowolopki, Smocza, Leszno, Karmelicka – in order to get into contact with the people from those workshops. The other group is supposed to continue the work on the tunnel na Sw. Jerskiej 30. I go with the first group. We are going to look for the brothers, Jews, but we might find death ... but we don't pay attention to the imminent danger and then again the night belongs to us. We won't let this advantage be taken away from us. After 10 pm and a light meal, we put rugs over our shoes to silence our footsteps. We hear the guns, and we accomplish acrobatic routine while getting down from the third floor to the courtyard. Through the opening in the wall in Zamenhofa 24 we reach the street. The sky is foggy, the street is dead, and the June wind is blowing through the open-wide street. The wind blows through the shells of the remaining houses and stirs up huge dust clouds while pulling down large pieces of plaster from the facades that fall down with dangerously loud thumps and break into pieces. The wind also likes to overuse its power and terrorize pieces of metal sheets, including those not fully burned, and wake them up to make them dance under its tutelage, to bend under the strength of its blows, sounding out melancholic songs ... The wind doesn't spare the doors, windows, frames, or the wooden

planks not burned down fulfilling its sadistic tricks. Open windows or doors hanging over the precipice are unable to withstand the opposition of the wind. Finally those inanimate objects were upset with the violence and began to push the door and window frames against the walls so that the window panes were breaking with a loud deadened sound as if to protest! It's a dark silent night. The fallen-asleep Jewish cemetery, "the ghetto," woke up and is mourning its inhabitants. It is a broken, raspy, and tired cry ... The lyrics of its song are only known to us, the Jews who march through the hermetically closed off cage of the ghetto at night in search for our scattered brothers to find out if they know about some passages through which you could slip away from the claws of the death and the bandits. We are approaching Pawia Street where the reflector from the Pawiak illuminates the whole street getting through to Zamenhofa, that not-inhabited jungle. It is a warning that we shouldn't move farther because it would be dangerous. But we don't want to have any warning lights, just the green ones ... always forward, still forward!! We pass by quickly and silently the corner of Pawia and approach Dzielna Street, and here also there is a reflector looking at us threatening as it lights up the whole street protecting the access to it. For a while the shadows on the rubble accompany us to Zamenhofa 12. We leave everything behind and get to Nowolipie where there are the patrols of the bandits. The house number five is now a big pile of rubble. The steel planks stand up as a mute reproach ... we stop and silently climb the rubble of the former house in order to observe the guards and their positioning. There comes a series of shots from behind the wall – didn't hit anything – but in a flash the realization returns that we are still under the blockade. Right away we can hear from all sides the bandits shooting. We know very well their tactics of making us afraid ... we move on. Wherever we look, we only see the contours of houses and the remnants of the walls like naked skeletons drying out from the longing for their providers ... we approach Karmelicka. Around us burned down houses near where Nowolipie and Karmelicka meet. We get to the Schultz district towards Karmelicka 15. It's pouring cats and dogs, and in the middle of the courtyard there is a pile of Jewish corpses, the remnants of houses, and the rubble ... we're listening, but to our ears of the seasoned "gruzowcy"<sup>39</sup> nothing worth paying attention to comes. All is steeped in a perpetual dream with the inhabitants of the ghetto.

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<sup>39</sup> Those living in the rubble.

Look at the dead Jews, the corpses. Look at the procession of men and women and Jewish children and those ten thousands of Warsaw Jews! Millions of Polish Jews! A few million of European Jews! All of them are crawling to you so that you can be made responsible, responsible for the ideally and precisely prepared mass murder! ... The Jewish corpses crawled to you and surround the great table of justice – the WORLD! The corpses demand justice and punishment, and the revenge of their innocently lost young blood!

But what is this? The souls of the dead are being raised over the tribunal and protest: “Now that we don’t live, when our whole generations were murdered ... only now we can get justice ... the world “pretends” to be outraged, to be the judges who will utter sentences for the horrid murderers. But is there a proportional punishment at all for these crimes that would be comparable with our suffering and that would facilitate atonement for the crimes, the murder of millions of European Jews??? Is there such a punishment at all that would pay for the annihilation of the culture and literature of the Jewish people? Is there?

The souls of the killed Jewish youth in Europe demand categorically the removal of diplomatic England as a part of the tribunal because they killed two birds with one bullet during the fire of the war – they solved the Jewish question ...

The souls of the killed Jewish youth in Europe have also objections to the inclusion of the sworn-in democrats of the United States of America, who already in 1940 made a sacrifice out of the Polish Jews to the cause of the war, and to whom in the most critical moments we were already lost ...

“The souls of the innocent Jewish youth and children murdered – they decided unanimously to entrust Palestine to you as a payment for this unheard of mass murder and bestiality!!!

Only you EREC<sup>40</sup> are called to and have the absolute right to judge the despicable, degenerated fellow-citizens, our betrayers Poles, and the bloody Polish provokers from the Polish grenade police and the German barbarians.

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<sup>40</sup> The Land of Israel, Eretz Yisrael, is the traditional Jewish name for an area of indefinite geographical extension also called the Land of Canaan, the Promised Land, the Holy Land, and the Palestine. The definitions of the limits of this territory vary between passages in the Hebrew Bible, with specific mentions in Genesis 15, Exodus 23, Numbers 34, and Ezekiel 47.

To your protective wings, the silenced witnesses are drawn, millions of murdered Jews, and demand a fair and appropriate punishment determined by the degree of guilt of the barbarians of the XX century. Walking through the streets of the former ghetto I see you, the Jewish souls how you crawl to us, the Jews who are alive – I hear and comprehend each and every word you say, your demands. I understand your language completely and grasp your complaints from which one great truth emerges. At the heart of this is: We, the innocent, got insidiously murdered!!! This dark, windy, starless night, I would like to embrace your countenances, kiss them, and let myself be swallowed with you by the pit of death.

What is my present life or even my future life without you, my loved ones, brother Jews? Vegetating.

We searched along Nowolipie Street and the courtyards, but we didn't encounter any trace of Jews alive. We also checked the Toebens area in Leszno and all the courtyards, but we only encountered the skeletons of burned-down buildings, the rubble, the bomb craters, the barbarian traces of the hunt after Jewish bunkers, and the mounds of corpses. The stench of decomposing bodies, which are scattered around in different courtyards and in the streets like garbage, reaches us everywhere. On our way back, we noticed that all the sewage manholes along the streets were blown up and stoppered with old metal junk.

In the district of Schultz and "little Toebens" we didn't encounter even one human being alive even though on April 19 there were about 12,000 lively, healthy, and mostly young Jews here. The bandits either transported those people to the Lublin area to be mass-murdered there or they murdered them odiously already here. The fact is that they are no longer alive. In the great cemetery that is the ghetto, in the Karmelicka garden amidst the total ruin and the rubble the linden trees that survived the fire are blooming quite normally. The July sun burns us mercilessly. It is spring, a beautiful time when the whole nature awakes from the lethargy. The trees are blooming, getting ready for fruit and decorating their branches with a green crown. Only the trees here are able to use the goodness of spring and are partaking in this resurrection ... When the nature is awaking to the new life and bears fruit, we, the Jews, are in the sad and merciless fall season, harsh and turbulent. The fall brought with it a mass of heavy black clouds in which the immense hurricane-like thunderstorm was born, nothing seen before in the history of the world. The destructive thunderstorm that razed to the ground the last bastion of Polish Jewry and wrought havoc is his



still with us and doesn't spare any of us, Jews. We are living through the second tragic fall although the calendar shows summer 1940, July, and spring 1943; for us it's the total dusk of Jewish annihilation, till all of us are no more.

After hour walk, we conclude that the chances of survival for us are minimal. We return to our joint in silence, with no words. The words for us are superfluous in the face of real facts and the tragedy. Only our souls are crying, and our hearts full of sorrow now carry the newest disappointment within. Till now we couldn't believe the scale of the tragedy; we didn't believe that we wouldn't find anyone alive in this terrain. The disappointment is too painful to react to it with words. Our hearts are bleeding, and we are shivering like in fever while we speed up on our way to the joint. At 3 am it's dawning. The sky is covered with a steel layer of clouds. Massive cloud bodies move to unite into a pouring rain. This makes us happy still, the rain, or rather the water is a blessing for us because we use it to live on. At 3:30 am we enter our joint. And here from the bag of goodies we get other disappointments and heartbreaks. The second group brought some gruesome news that the bandits began their day of work yesterday at 3:30 am and blew up the tunnel in Sw. Jerska 30. In Sw. Jerska 34 in the third floor of the third courtyard, the murderers found a joint with six people. After robbing them, they shot them dead, poured gasoline over them, and set them on fire. In Sw. Jerska 34, the bones and skulls of today's victims, the Winogron family and others, that were not fully burned are lying around. From today on, the leadership has decided to have two lookouts patrolling already at 3 am.

## Wednesday, June 30, 1943

At 5 am our lookout observed the bandits marching along Gesia Street as they were escorting two Jewish traitors from Befehlstelle. Suddenly all that parade stopped in Gesia 3 in front of a rubble-house (1939), and one could hear voices yelling and ordering the Jews in the bunker to come out – the orders were in Yiddish. They were trying the same trick: “Jews, come out, it's the end of war.” Nobody, however, appeared. Then the bandits started throwing the rubble and drilling openings in the ruins. This work took them four hours. But they didn't give up their search. Around 10 am, they drilled a hole and sounded agitated and cheerful when yelling: “Juden-Bunko.” This message spread as wildfire.

Since then we all stood near the window of our joint looking out on Gesia 5, where starting with number 5 all the residences are burned down and the neighboring space is empty so that the wall of our joint is not adjacent to any buildings. The bandits spread blocking the second entrance to Gesia (there is a wall in the middle) and placing their guards on the corner of Nalewki and Gesia up till the corner of Zamenhofa and Gesia. To each of those courtyards a guard was assigned. And near our window, there was one too in a white uniform with a pulverizer. From that moment on we needed to scale down on our observations so that we had only two people observing. I and Festinger did the job and had to be careful not to cough, not to sneeze, or breathe heavily, otherwise our “play” would have ended not exactly the way we envisioned, that is, it would have been the end of our joint and us. A fine pair of field glass proved to be quite valuable to us as we could observe what was going on while being not too close to the window. We also could hear the most quiet moves from the outside, the place of the tragedy in Gesia 3. After a while we heard an order from an SS-man: “Schmeiss rein das Gift.”<sup>41</sup> We didn’t have to wait for the results as at 10:30 am we could see the first figures of walking skeletons coughing terribly and looking as if they were choking; and indeed the new victims were choking because of the gas that was used on them. The joy broke out among the murderers, and the bursts of laughter were unceasing and accompanied by screams: “Jude halt!”<sup>42</sup> it all took about fifteen minutes. From the bunker, fifteen men, women, and children came out. The bandits surrounded them tightly and positioned them along the wall. After the bandits got over the wicked joyfulness, and the Jews were done coughing, one of the SS-men entered the circle and gave a speech: “Ihr alle Männer kommt zur Arbeit nach Poniatowo in einem Metalwerk von W.C. Toebens! Es ist erlaubt mit sich mitzunehmen, Geld, Gepeko, und Koffer, wesche, Schuhe, und anzüge. wir alle komt noch einmal in bunker, zu drei mann unter der schutz von zwei begleiter Gendarmerii, zu hollen die sachen! Jemand versucht auszuricken und wird sofort getodt.”<sup>43</sup> After this nice speech, the bandits escorted groups of three

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<sup>41</sup> Throw in the poison.

<sup>42</sup> Stop, Jew!

<sup>43</sup> All men will come to work in Poniatowo at W.C. Toebens metalworks. It is allowed to take money, bags, suitcases, clothing, shoes, and suits. We all will

people into and out of the bunker, but most people returned empty handed or with one small suitcase or a bag in hand. A few people had suitcases. Most likely such a speech has its charm, and everyone waits to see what this shepherd will do to them. But once such shepherd feels his power, he won't let go of it but will pursue it mercilessly.

And so the herd dances under the whip of the shepherd so as to please him since there is still hope, "but maybe?"

Maybe they just want to scare us? Maybe they just want to try our endurance? Because how can they kill me, me Abramek so alive and healthy, so thinks a six-year-old Abramek, Sura, or Jakub that were taken out of the bunker and suffer through different tortures of body and soul, give in to that tyranny of the bandits, to their sadistic games (some of them) and hope till the last minute that they will be saved, till their bodies are penetrated by countless bullets and bleeding, and their souls are gone from them ...

Even at the places of executions when they see the preparations, they think, "it's not for us; they won't kill me ... perhaps we will survive." Only then when the bullets get stuck in the body, even the children realize, "they kill me because I am a Jew!!!" And they leave this life to go away into eternity ...

The bandits arranged their victims in a single file and ordered to make a pile out of the luggage. Thereafter a command was given: "All undress completely till you're naked within five minutes." People started undressing lazily, but they were reminded to hurry when the guns hit them, and the bayonets stabbed them. However, the men stood there in their long underpants and women in their bras and panties, not knowing that the sadists will use this to show off what they mean. One of the SS-men approached one male victim, tore off his underpants and began kicking him while the other (in gloves) kept pulling and yanking the victim's penis ... When that Jew was screaming at the top of his lungs, the SS-man was laughing hard. The Jew fainted, but was hit again and then got up this time completely naked. After that, they got hold of one of the women, and pull off her panties along with her bra while hitting her. And this way they treated every person with beating either with their fists or whips, or using bayonets, injuring their faces; from some bodies blood rushed in streams! A young girl

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go inside the bunker, every three men with a guard of two policemen so that you can get your things. If someone tries to escape, s/he will be shot dead.

was ashamed to be naked in front of the barbarians. She was raised in Warsaw and most likely was unfamiliar with the morality in the West that the barbarians introduced in Berlin itself ... When an SS-man approached her to get her panties off, the girl reacted with a desperate gesture by picking up a brick off the ground, but before she was able to throw it into the barbarian, she was shot dead and her body started getting cold ... After this scene, everyone was standing naked without the proverbial fig leaves. But as it turned out this all was only a sadistic prelude to the main performance, the bestial mass murder performed by the brutal sadistic murderers, degenerates, barbarians of the XX century, and directed by the hand of Hitler himself. These bandits graduated from many schools of murder and gained a thorough education in how to murder in sophisticated way those innocent naïve people. Four SS-men who apparently were authorized to do searches said to put away the clothing about three meters away and so the personal searches began. The SS-men were picking up women's breasts, looking inside their mouths, under the armpits, then they ripped women's vaginas apart with their own hands looking inside for hidden treasures. They had the victims turned upside down and looked into the rectum; they felt them as if they were geese for lard. They the people were ordered to jump and spread their legs or do sit-ups in hopes that perhaps some diamonds will still fall out. Those who resisted were beaten till their blood was pouring out from their bodies. Everyone went through this search, men, women, children, and the witnesses were the rubble, the empty street, the bloody stones in the streets, and we, random viewers.

I wanted to escape this tragic view because why do I need to watch the tyranny of the inescapable barbarian death if they will die the same death and will take its mystery with them, the secret of their brothers' death. My heart was weeping like never before, and I was lacking my tears, but somehow the mysterious power was holding me together at my post. The SS-men, having a good time while doing the search, were laughing and enjoyed the suffering of their victims and didn't spare their comments either. When they were done with the act one, they proceeded to the next part, that is, to looking through purses, wallets, and clothing, centimeter by centimeter examining even the underwear. From some clothing pieces they were able to fish out some valuables and took everything starting with a pen and watches and ending with jewelry and money. During the search, Hauptsturmführer Konrad arrived in his car, smiled sweetly at the bandits, looked through the

ranks of the freshly-caught naked victims, collected the robbed goods from his auditors, said goodbye with a sweet smile ... and drove away.

Having finished the general search, at 4 pm they told them to get up, shake out the clothing, and get dressed (till now they were sitting naked on the pavement leaning against the wall of the ghetto). After that they told to the people to march without their luggage to the Umschlagplatz from where they will be taken to work in Poniatow. The luggage will be transported threr separately. They warned everyone not to stop out of line otherwise they will be shot on the spot. I forgot to add that they were also interrogated about "Juden-Bunko," but everyone avoided a straightforward answer. Another group of Jews, 25 of them, were also marched on the death trail, the way to the execution. One more link in the chain of the collective bestial murder on Isarel! Then the hand pallets pulled up, and some civilians loaded the luggage on the, and left. In about half an hour you could hear a series of shots from the Zamenhof garden, and some more shots coming after that; the whole shooting took about 15 minutes nonstop. Certainly those latest victims were executed. After an hour, we could smell the burning bodies – the corpses turning into ashes. Only their pure unblemished souls left them and were soaring over us –the living Jews – with their silent complaint on their lips with congealed blood. Why? 39 people cried long-withheld cry. The walls of the joint were shaking with weeping, the see of tears was running down our sweaty and startled faces, and our lips were moving, repeating after the Jewish souls: WHY? This one word encompassed all our sufferings. We didn't pay attention to the danger we were in, but we all were just sobbing together, and our weeping was so sincere that it could move even the hearts made of stone. And the beautiful sun couldn't take the sight of the bestiality and disappeared. And the natured moved so by the horror rubbed its eyes and started to cry with us ... moistening the ground.

We prayed kaddish for the tragically murdered ones, lamenting them and crying. All that sorrow that had been kept inside of us and was now pouring out loudly was interrupted by the clinking of broken glass, as someone moved in the courtyard. At that moment, the lookout alarmed us about a person nearing our courtyard. "An informant!" it occurred to us all. Most likely we were observed while observing the events, and now the perpetrators sent someone to check it out how approach us. The visions of such a prophesy pierced our hearts. But immediately we transformed ourselves into vigilant tigers ready to kill our pray and overpower it before it makes a move. We could hear the noise of a weapon and the spirit of the

proud, strong, and relentless uprising fighters awaken in us. We positioned ourselves near the window looking out on the courtyard Nalewki Street 27 and surreptitiously were observing the movements of the intruder. His steps were unsure, and he displayed hair-raising nervousness. He wore only pants, shirt, and shoes and was bleeding as well. With every step he took, he looked around. He entered the house on the opposite side of our building while examining the access to our joint or looking for a place to hide. In the middle of the rubble, the man gave the impression of being misplaced as if a character in a movie about the year 2000, who was miraculously saved after a cataclysm but cannot find help or a shelter while blaze is wild around him. He stopped in our hallway as if hopeless, tired of life, and started crying pitifully while leaning against the wall. His head sagged on his shoulders and he stayed like this without moving. We were thinking that he might be playing a role, but in reality he is an informer. At any rate, he needed to be captured alive and taken to the cellar. Festiner, Trynkiewicz, and Z. Asenheim volunteered for the job and lowered themselves down surprising the mysterious man from three directions. You could hear the scream, "stop!" and the mysterious man attempted to run but found himself in front of three gun barrels that showed him the futility of such action. He surrendered. They opened the trap door and four of them entered the cellar and then closed the door again. To our great surprise this man threw himself on Z. Grynbaum's neck and crying with happiness greeted him. It turned out it was Grynbaum's brother-in-law Lipski who, upon our request, told us about everything he went through from the beginning of the action till now. On April 30, he left "Heres" where he lived and snuck into the "wild territory" to Nalewki 27 where the family bunker was that they prepared in advance. However, in the middle of May when their bunker was found out, he ran away together with L. Grynbaum to Zamenhofa 24 where they waited till the night came. At night he went to look for the doctors' bunker in Gesia 6 where he got held up as a "traitor" and couldn't leave the bunker being watched closely. Apparently that bunker had 22 walled up cellar restrooms that went underneath the house in Gesia 6 and also those in Gesia 1 and 3. The whole structure was connected through a little tunnel under the road. When the bandits discovered the bunker at Gesia 6 as well as at Gesia 1 and 3 together with 30 people hiding, they blew up that part not knowing about the other part. This way 31 people were saved. They were waiting in to see if someone didn't turn them in, but in the meantime they got to work in order to be able to function in the new circumstances. The brothers Klajnbarer 16-18 years

old – till the beginning of the war secondary school students – said that there was no time “to despair” but to grab the spades and shovels and ordered everyone to work. They made a plan and were able to dig a tunnel leading to the storage with provisions. Working many nights without resting they dug a well 6 meters deep from where they got water. After they secured the food, they worked to secure the bunker. They constructed a tunnel of 80 meters going in three different directions thus creating three exits: one in Gesia 1, the second in Gesia 3, and the third one in Nalewki 27 connecting with the bunker of Grynbaum. In that bunker, there were 14 doctors, male and female, from the hospital “Czysto,” and nobody had the right to leave it. Only the brothers Klajnbaier sometimes at night would leave to get some wooden planks for the tunnel or to check out the situation with the action against the Jews. The devilish music of firing guns coming from beyond the ghetto confirmed that the action was still going on. The life in the bunker was quiet, peaceful, filled with work at night by the light of a kerosene lamp. During the day people were resting. The heat, the lack of air, and the sweat were exhausting the last reserve of their strength. But the faith in the fact that they would be able to survive the war in the bunker sustained them. All the hardships were tolerated while thinking about the time after the war when they will get rewarded. They gave up two rooms and were crowding in the remaining three in order to be able to continue constructing tunnels and while doing so they accumulated about 6 train cars of sand. They did everything to survive. But the tragic fate came upon them on June 30, 1943. That day they cooked in their kitchen till 5 am when they extinguished the fire. Suddenly they heard drilling over their heads and started running through the tunnel of Gesia 1. But to their great surprise they saw the Germans nearby. Then they returned to the bunker and were waiting for the further developments till they felt gas coming in and started to choke. Since they lost their temper and became disoriented, they left the bunker and emerged outside. Yet, Mr. Lipski, who already had been through a similar ordeal in his own bunker, didn’t lose his cool and used the rags as a filter for breathing and while others were leaving the bunker he buried himself in the cellar and waited. He heard how the Germans were escorting other, searching the cellars, and finally set on fire all the bedding and clothing and poisoned the well. He was beginning to suffocate with fumes from the fire. Luckily the bandits didn’t return to the bunker any more so he waited till he heard their footsteps going away. After half an hour he decided to leave the bunker. He ran across the street and because he knew the opening leading

from Gesia 5 to Nalewki 27 he found himself in our courtyard and joint. Lipski told us how to take advantage of the food and clothing left in the tunnel leading to the bunker. Because it was already 10 pm, we left our joint to go to the doctors' bunker no. 2. H. Zamsz joined our group. When we entered, we discovered that the fire was only in his imagination, but the gas, phosgene,<sup>44</sup> that had been used in made it impossible to remain there. We then wen to the garden in Zamenhof to check on the bodies from the doctors' bunker, but there were only some bones and ashes ... During the quiet night we fell asleep sobbing in our broken hearts, and our tears were falling on the ashes of our brothers. I took a look at Lipski – that man wasn't rejoicing in being wondrously saved but was walking in the cemetery of the brave Jews and mourned the doctors – the newly murdered victims. Yes! You cannot walk in the cemetery while laughing and being happy about your own existence. In this holy historic cemetery you can only walk while crying. It is necessary to unceasingly grieve and shed the tears of sadness over those Jewish victims wickedly captured by deceit and murdered in barbaric fashion; to grieve over millions of Jews who perished yesterday, today, and will perish tomorrow ... In that hermetic cage of the ghetto, you should hear only the cry of the brave Jews, and its echo should resound across the world. This weeping will penetrate every corner of the earth, and its sound will inspire all the people who are worthy to call themselves human beings.

Wednesday, July 7, 1943

Because further stay in the rubble is not safe, for one week we have been building a new shelter. The leading thought is to get ready for winter. When

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<sup>44</sup> Phosgene is a poisonous colorless gas. Its odor in low concentrations resembles freshly cut hay or grass. John Davy synthesized the chemical was synthesized in 1812 by exposing a mixture of carbon monoxide and chlorine to sunlight and named it phosgene referencing the use of light to promote the reaction (Greek, phos—light and gene—born). It became important in the chemical industry as the 19th century progressed, particularly in dye manufacturing and later was used as a chemical weapon already during WWI.



the first snow falls, we will be completely cut off from the daylight since every step on the fresh snow will be dangerous. We worked energetically, hungry, cold, and dirty. We didn't foresee one thing—in the cemetery you must not build ... this nearsightedness took a bloody revenge on us.

We worked through many nights making the cellar deeper (because the ceiling was too low), we dug out a well and a tunnel (masking the entrance to the shelter). We took out several wagons of sand and hid it (this was from all the cellars and passages). We had an installed stove and ready cots. Even the kitchen dishes were already in the new place. We were finishing the last part of our job—bricking up the cellar opening. And this is when the unfortunate accident happened. We were busy transferring bricks down to the cellar. Burned-up bricks were very fragile, to the point that when passed from one hand to the other, they would break. Several times the broken off pieces fell down with some noise. It was a moonlit night. We were working fast as if on fire. We didn't think that the noise of one falling brick could cause trouble—bring the Germans. Besides our lookout was on guard next to the gate, and this fact made us comfortable. But something else happened. We were surprised by a night German patrol (their shoes were wrapped up in cotton). Suddenly we heard the command, “Hände hoch!”<sup>45</sup> and a few shots went up into the air. We were standing at that time one next to each other while transporting the bricks. Zemsz, who was standing the closest to the Germans started shooting towards them and fell dead. Everybody else was able to back off into the cellar. The cellar had two exits. We used the second one and escaped into Nalewki Street. At the gate we stumbled upon the corpse of Heniek Billauer from our patrol. Nalewki Street was full of German patrols. They opened fire right away. We were shooting back not often but on target. L. Lewinson and I broke through to Nalewki 25/23 and ran into the Germans. They died because they ran out of ammunition. From the whole group of seven people busy with that job, only three survived. Czarnoczapka hid in the cellar successfully. From our combat group, only a small group without ammunition was left. The old source of moral courage, spiritual steadiness, and the source of the energy needed for fighting—is being extinguished—because the tough and brave comrades-in-arms left us.

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<sup>45</sup> Hands up!

Wednesday, July 21, 1943

The murderous locust has been camping out in our territory, the fourth courtyard of Nalewki 25/23, where they were looking for the Jews. They were also searching underneath our joint, but we didn't lose our temper because by now we've been trained in keeping calm, and the joint was camouflaged pretty well so that we were able to trick them. The barbarians didn't give up because they needed to vent their savage instincts. They went from one apartment to the other breaking the window panes that made a lot of noise when falling to pieces. They were also randomly shooting at things yelling at the top of their lungs: "Alles Scheisse! Die Juden sind nicht da!"<sup>46</sup> We were laughing inside at this spectacle and at their "sly" tactics of searching ... But from their behavior I concluded that the bandits have innate instincts for infanticide. On the days when they are unable to hunt down Jewish children between 2 to 4 years old, they take revenge on the world and their surroundings and treat them as their enemies. The craze of destruction possessed their satanic beings fully. But why should we be surprised? When the murderers don't kill enough people each day, they are not treated as saints and not surrounded by the halo of greatness in buffets, restaurants, cafes, bakeries, hotels, etc., and are not being served because the great heroes didn't amass enough funds from Jewish corpses. I understand you, barbarians, you've been driven over the edge. In the evening in the Europejski hotel, your delectable Manka, Franka, or Krycha<sup>47</sup> will be awaiting you, and you will arrive empty-handed, without a trace of Jewish blood on your murderous limbs ... You know very well, you German murderer, that in the heart of Poland in Warsaw without any assets, you will lose your value and here's your check mate.

And when you run out of the Jews – you with your experience in mass murder will go forth and hit the bottom, and you will murder some more ...

And in your bottomless anger toward anything that is human, that arose from the civilized hearts, cultured people, you will destroy and defile it and mix it with the blood of European people.

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<sup>46</sup> Everything is shit! The Jews are not here!

<sup>47</sup> Polish female names

Our sincere desire is to see your allies in this murder, the Poles, receiving a just punishment from your hands for the cooperation in the mass murders on the Jews ...

If I am lucky enough to have a joyous moment in my life, it will be when the Polish murderers will be buried in the same grave as the German ones. And on the grave, a simple wooden cross will be erected. Then I will generously shed a tear over their grave (they never did that) and place a nice wreath with the words: "To the united dead souls and hearts of the frontline against the Jews, the murderers of the Jews, the executioners of the mass murder on the Jews, deceased deservedly!" And at the end of the banner, an unobtrusive signature: "The surviving Jews."

This is the third night when nobody leaves the joint. We eat only sugar with noodles. We are becoming weaker from hour to hour. Our nerves are irritated. The dirt and lice are not helping either. The July sun is "brave" and burns mercilessly. Only one more day. One more day, and everything will be all right. But for how long will we be able to replace reality with this pretending? I count the days I won't live. I believe I will still be here. We ran out of ammunition. All we have are five bullets in three of our Browning.

Friday, August 16, 1943

After a long wait, a "messenger of life" that "leads to the paradise" appeared. Szladkowski, Rudy Jozek, and other traffickers arrived via the canals (from Franciszkanska Street) and brought us weapons, ordered and long-awaited provisions, newspapers, electric flashlights, ferrocerium pieces,<sup>48</sup> alcohol, etc.). We paid for it all with clothing. According to our estimate, it was 80,000 zlotys. We found out about the landing of allied forces in Sicily and the demise of Mussolini. Our hearts were filled with faith. Perhaps we will survive? Szladkowski promised us that we will get accepted by the partisans, and he will come to fetch us next week. The fresh brown bread tastes unbelievably. The horizon became brighter somehow. However, we are afraid of tomorrow ... Polish district, partisans ... it's difficult to believe. From the pit, the cemetery—to be able to return to a normal life? Is it possible?

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<sup>48</sup> Synthetic material used in cigarette lighters that produces hot sparks.

The seven-year-old Leos Zemsz claims: “since we have white bread, there will be a blue day for us tomorrow.”

Saturday, August 17, 1943

Most likely the Germans noticed us yesterday when we were returning with heavy bags of provisions, and they tracked our joint. At 10 am a German troop of about 30 soldiers barged into our hideout. We kept our cool and were awaiting further developments. From this joint we didn't have any alternate exits to escape. Just in case we were to be trapped again, I installed a metal line of 25 meters leading to Nalewki 21. My companions called that line a “way of suicide.” The line, however, saved the lives of nine people. And how that happened, I will recount it now.

In order to get to us, the Germans were forced to reach the 5<sup>th</sup> floor first and from there using ladders go to the 4<sup>th</sup> floor where our joint was. The murderers brought firefighter's ladders and ordered their Ukrainian vassals to climb up to us. We had four guns and eight bullets. When the first Ukrainian reached the height of the 5<sup>th</sup> floor, the bullet from my gun made him go down. At the same moment the girl Lewinzon—under emotional distress—committed suicide jumping down from the 4<sup>th</sup> floor to the pavement of the courtyard. Following her example, down went the woman Blajwajs and little Leos Zemsz with the scream, “I won't go to the Germans!” This unusual incident turned the attention of the Germans away from us. We desperately grabbed the rope and went sliding down.

We ran out to Nalewki 21. Here some strange people in striped jail uniforms warned us: “Hier sind Deutsche.”<sup>49</sup> With a begging gaze, they asked us to run away. We managed to get to Pawia Street 22 (through Zamenhof 13) across from Pawiak, where we collapsed from exhaustion. Everyone was seriously wounded because the rope got into the flesh and bone, and nobody was able to move their hands without hissing in pain. At midnight we were at Nalewki 23/25, and the courtyard was surrounded by a patrol of the murderers, in the middle a stack of the burning corpses of our comrades. Today we lost literally everything. We were left with the guns and some bullets (meant for us). The whole area of the ghetto is secured by the German patrols especially today. We maneuvered throughout for over an

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<sup>49</sup> The Germans are here.

hour in order to get to our new joint at Pawia 22. My comrades are afraid of our “neighbor” Pawiak, but in my opinion, it is the best to stay in the mouth of a lion itself.

But, we are facing starvation anyhow ... Throughout the night we were speculating and commenting on the surprise of the Germans when they see fresh bread and newspapers with yesterday’s date. I’m very much interested in seeing their reaction.

Saturday, September 25, 1943

The third day of starvation passed today. All of us are getting weaker. We’ve decided to eat the raw beans of which we still have one kilo. The reserve of rain water is also depleted. The matches and ferrocerium pieces are completely gone. For three days, we’ve been looting in the ghetto and haven’t seen a sign of a single human being alive. Strengthened patrols make the rounds in the ghetto all night long. We don’t have much hope for procuring any provisions because the entry to the canal used by the traffickers—under Szladkowski’s lead—was blocked with metal objects along the 10-meter area by the Germans who surveil it also at night. The tunnel—leading to Sz. Kac’s provision storeroom—from which we’ve been getting our food till now has been blown up by the Germans. We lack strength to dig yet another tunnel. The Germans also burned down the provision warehouse at the bunker of the “doctors at Czyste hospital.” Our patrol, consisting of two people, went yesterday to check out the area of the brush makers and never returned. Lolek Lewnizon and Abram Starowiejski left us, too.

Out of 45 people (of our group), there are only four alive. The woman Zemszowa is all swollen, because of hunger, and completely despondent. Czarnoczapka is physically exhausted and became morally indifferent ... Szerszen prays and is waiting for a miracle. The faith is keeping his spirits up. He seems to take it all pretty well because he still has faith in God. I’m physically exhausted and am swelling up because of the hunger. To my mind the best option for us would be to get to the wall and across to the Polish district. If we won’t succeed, the bullet waiting in the gun will save me from this oppression ... (I’m counting on help from Captain Stefan Miller in the Polish neighborhood). According to my plan, we should leave our joint tomorrow at nightfall, get to the wall from the side of Bonifraterska and Franciszkanska streets, and use a ladder to conduct an observation of the policemen, their number and positions. The ladder must have a rope

attached that we will use (at a fitting moment) and that will allow us to descend to the pavement without any noise. We should cover the wall, which is studded with pieces of glass, with a comforter. In case there will be many policemen at Bonifraterska street, we have to use a trick, that is, one of us (at a given signal) will throw over the wall (at the corner of Sw. Jerska and Bonifraterska) the last grenade, which certainly will divert the attention of the police from us at the wall on the corner of Bonifraterska and Franciszkańska—and then we will jump.

My comrades listened to my plan without any emotions or enthusiasm. The hunger numbed everything. In addition, the proximity of Pawiak affects our mental state negatively. Every day we hear unhuman screams, and at night the moaning, shots, and we see the flames coming from the makeshift crematorium, it appears from Dzielna Street—one can smell burned bodies.

In “Gesiowka”<sup>50</sup> a colossal factory of death is growing. Massive walls with towers and the Ukrainians with R.K.M.’s are guarding several hundred of Soviet war prisoners and several hundred people in striped prison uniforms who speak French. From the ceiling of our joint we see the barracks and the protruding huge chimney. Szerszen claims that here in the heart of Warsaw, there is a new crematorium being built. The thuds of pics, the clatter of axes, and the screeching of drills doesn’t stop, not even for a while. The work is conducted during the day and night by the Polish workers who are brought here to the ghetto from the Polish district. The scary thing is that in the courtyard there are prison guards looting ever day now. But usually they leave after half an hour of searching, carrying some pots or pans. In the courtyard, there is a children’s bike lying around, a rocking horse, ice-skates (the remains of “Wertfassung”<sup>51</sup> work), but their owners don’t live any

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<sup>50</sup> A colloquial name given to the prison in Gesia Street (Goose Street) in Warsaw. Under German occupation this prison was transformed into a concentration camp equipped with a crematorium.

[https://www.chronicsofterror.pl/dlibra/results?action=AdvancedSearchAction&type=-3&search\\_attid1=62&search\\_value1=Pawiak%2C+Szucha%2C+G%C4%99si%C3%B3wka+%E2%80%93+Warsaw+death+blocks](https://www.chronicsofterror.pl/dlibra/results?action=AdvancedSearchAction&type=-3&search_attid1=62&search_value1=Pawiak%2C+Szucha%2C+G%C4%99si%C3%B3wka+%E2%80%93+Warsaw+death+blocks)

<sup>51</sup> In the Nazi Germany the policy of Wertfassung required companies to issue shares gratis to social establishments.

longer. In our courtyard there is an old synagogue that still stands here untouched.

At night I'm having strange nightmares. I see the synagogue all crowded. The men in white coats, the women (on the balcony) in black dresses, the Jewish children dressed up. Their faces serious, concentrated. From all the mouths, one powerful scream comes out—to pray "Kol Nidre"—"we were cheated!" "Where is justice?" and later they take us on our shoulders—just like Noah, who let the dove free from his ark—they let us go into the mad waves of life—to the Polish district. Their unwritten testament, and at the same time the order, sounds: "Tell the world what we have seen. Demand revenge!"

Today we haven't decided anything. The chances of our survival are equal to death of starvation.

Sunday, September 26, 1943

The day of the decision arrived. From early in the morning it has been raining, thick fog spread over the great Jewish cemetery: the Warsaw ghetto. The drops of rain were hitting the burned tin and played the somber prelude to the last act of the tragedy, and like heavy big stone covered our hearts, already so weary. The hunger—as an intrusive beggar—didn't leave us alone. The sadness, desperation, and the doubt surrounded us as a ring out of steel that squeezes you before death. The woman Zemsz wants to commit suicide as soon as possible. Czarnoczapka is ready for everything. Szerszen doesn't let go of his prayer book, as if he were consulting with God what to do. I insist on my plan. The decisive moment has arrived. We must act. The death must be worthy of us.

At midday, we made up our minds. We are going to the wall. We're getting a "shower" under the streams of rain. Mending our clothing and getting rid of lice took us a few hours. Slowly it's getting dark. The rain was stopping and increasing anew. Last preparations, checking the ladder, the rope, the weapons, rehearsing the order of the jump and division of tasks; last Jewish Mohicans from the bottom of the grave are getting ready for the showdown. We look like well-made caricatures going to a mask ball (each of us tried to look like an Aryan). At 6:30 in the evening we were on our way. We crawl a few hundred meters and leave the Pawiak patrols behind.

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Agitated and anxious, we pass Zamenhofa Street, cross several courtyards (on the top of the rubble), and get to Franciszkanska Street at the corner of Bonifraterska. We are completely soaked. Near the wall, the fear and uncertainty subside because of the unflinching will—to get through! Or to be hanging on the wall as a symbol of protest. Different thoughts and visions are going through our minds, and we cannot concentrate in order to talk to our comrades—perhaps the last time. The ladder is already leaning against the wall. I have to conduct the observation of the wall guards on the Aryan side; Czarnoczapka has to throw the grenade; Szerszen, as the first one, has to jump down to the “paradise.” We set up the place where to meet in the Polish neighborhood; it is the church in Długa Street. I stood on the ladder. As soon as I stuck my head out, my gaze met a policeman accompanied by a grenade police, who were on duty at the corner of Franciszkanska and Bonifraterska. I noticed the second patrol at the corner of Konwiktorska and Bonifraterska, and the third at the corner of Sw. Jerska and Bonifraterska. This means the blockade continues. But we came here with our unmoved resolution. There is no way back. Bonifraterska Street belonging to the Polish neighborhood looked lively. Car traffic, trams, horse-drawn carriages, passersby attracted us. This “new” world seen through the eyes of the soul was more enticing than this one—seen up close. From the windows of the house in Bonifraterska 6, sun rays were piercing through, and you could hear dancing pairs’ drunken voices singing falsetto, “Drink, drink, drink, brother drink, and let the war rage long!”

The observation of the street took an hour. The curfew (in the Polish district) was approaching fast. The very last nervous preparations ... the culmination of the evening was approaching. The ladder was moved to the niche of the wall on Bonifraterska. Czarnoczapka stood at the corner of Sw. Jerska and Bonifraterska and was clutching a grenade. The last glance at Franciszkanska Street, the light sign with the flashlight, and you could hear a loud explosion ... The police ran to the place of the disaster shooting intensely and randomly. The passersby started running to the building entrances. For a moment I froze on the wall, lying there flat because of a passing by tram. The flash of light and again darkness. Spasmodic hold of the rope, and I found myself on the other side. Right behind me, Szerszen jumped, and the people from the nearby buildings emerged. When we got to Franciszkanska, some passersby welcomed us with the words full of irony, “clever Jews.” From others we heard, “Again the rats ran away from the ghetto.” But nobody approached us—maybe the guns in our hands scared



them away ... In one of the entrances in Nowiniarska, we took off our rags from the shoes, and here an incident took place. Before us a grenade policeman appeared. He spoke to us politely: "Boys, give me your money and go with God." There was no time to argue. We gave him 1000 zlotys threatening him that in case he wanted to blackmail us further, we'll pay him with the gun. That scumbag had number 1022.

In front of the church, we waited a few minutes till Zemszowa and Czarnoczapka ran to us out of breath. We waited 15 minutes till the curfew. We marched to Twarda Street 5 one by one keeping the distance from each other. The cellar (of the shattered buildings from the time of the fights in 1939) took us in and gave us shelter for the night. For now, we are saved. Tomorrow I need to get into contact with Captain Stefan Miller from A.L. so that he'll help us join the partisans. It is a dark, stormy night—but those who survive till tomorrow—will also get to see the dawn ...

# ON THE MARGINS: TESTIMONY OF LEON NAJBERG

## INTRODUCTION

The author, Leon Najberg alias Marian, fought in the Warsaw ghetto. His memoirs start in the spring of 1942. After the great action, he worked in the “Opel” workshop in Warsaw’s Żoliborz district. On April 17, 1943 he returned to the ghetto and is thus the eyewitness to the uprising in the Warsaw ghetto and the life at the bunkers and shelters on the site of a brush-makers’ workshop. On May 10, 1943, the author joined a group of fighters, and they hid in the rubble until September 1943. After getting out of the ghetto, the author hid on the “Aryan side” in the Bielany district. He lived through the Warsaw uprising and the evacuation to Pruszków, and is a witness to the fate of his family.

The author wrote his memoirs (eighteen notebooks) during his time in hiding on the “Aryan side” of Warsaw. Before he left Warsaw after the uprising, he buried them, and after liberation dug them out and handed them to a person who was supposed to take them abroad. As the original version of the memoirs had been lost, he dictated a second version to Klara Mirska from the Jewish Historical Institute. Part of the memoirs concerning the uprising in the ghetto and the author’s hiding in the rubble is Najberg’s manuscript recreated as a diary, the rest was recorded by Mirska. A copy combining the two texts (with the exception of the last fragment concerning the fate of the author after he left the ghetto) became the base for a book edition in Polish. In 1949 the author left for Israel. A Hebrew version of his memoirs was published under the title of *Aharonim biktse ha-mared shel geto Varshe*.

## THOUGHTS AND ASSOCIATIONS by Klara Mirska

We, the current staff members of the Jewish Historical Institute (Emanuel Ringelblum Jewish Historical Institute), unlike those who will come after us, are able to collect testimonies and documents while being able to establish contact with the people who survived the Nazi occupation. Therein lies our

great privilege as the employees of the Historical Institute. It is not often that historians get an opportunity to communicate with witnesses of an epoch pregnant with events. It needs to be realized that sometimes a testimony of an eyewitness is the only document that sheds light on the past. In this case, it is shedding light on a stretch of the Nazi-occupied past. How often, because of an omission of a testimony, the last chance of looking at the past is lost; the past that still seems close, still almost touchable, but as the time passes because of the lack of the material, the memory of those who died back then will fade.

We know about that what happened in Belzec from the testimony of the only eyewitness who remained alive out of thousands who perished. That testimony was published by the Jewish Historical Committee. About the murder of the Warsaw Jews in Poniatow we know only from the testimony of the only witness Rubinsztajn. And I remember how the director of the Historical Institute, Blumental, was interested in not losing that witness. That testimony, as the only proof of the Nazi crime in Poniatow, was published in Blumental's book titled, *Dokumenty I Material z czasow okupacji niemieckiej w Polsce*, in volume I, "Obozy."<sup>52</sup>

We could name many examples like these. That is why we are not permitted in the first place, as the direct employees of the Institute, to abandon the possibility of obtaining the original materials from so few remaining witnesses, and we must take a leading role in this endeavor. When writing I use first and foremost the pronoun "we" because I want to emphasize that the Jewish community should help us in contacting the witnesses. Rachel Auerbach gave me this kind of help when she asked me sometime ago why I wasn't trying to get a testimony of Leon Najberg. I knew that in the book, *Dokumenty I Material z czasow okupacji niemieckiej w Polsce*, in volume II, "Akcje I Wysziedlenia"<sup>53</sup> Leon Najberg's work was published in the form of a diary titled, "Gruzowcy." I didn't know anything else about him. Several details that Rachel Auerbach recounted put me on my guard right away. I felt that Najberg is exactly that witness we are looking for like for a gold mine. I found out that Leon Najberg was in the ghetto with

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<sup>52</sup> *Documents and Materials from the German Occupation in Poland* in volume I, "Camps."

<sup>53</sup> *Documents and Materials from the German Occupation in Poland*, in volume II, "Actions and Displacements."

a group of comrades till September 26, 1943. Out of all of them, he was the only one who remained alive. Just this fact alone was for me remarkable. In the memory of the next generations, the Warsaw ghetto from the time of the uprising will remain a burning ground, and after the uprising, a dead planet resembling a moonscape. And yet, even after the uprising life was still smoldering. We know nothing about that time period, that is, what we know is disproportionally little when considering a catastrophe in the Warsaw ghetto and how people lived in bunkers.

From Najberg I found out that after getting out of the ghetto on September 26, 1943, he contacted captain Miller, PPR<sup>54</sup> member whose goal was to save Najberg. Thus, he entrusted Najberg to the care of family Szczypiorski; together with captain Miller they guarded him considering taking care of him to be their mission. When he wanted to lessen their burden and to contact Rada Pomocy Żydom,<sup>55</sup> they didn't want to hear about

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<sup>54</sup> The Polish Workers' Party—Polska Partia Robotnicza, PPR—was a communist party in Poland from 1942 to 1948. It was founded as a reconstitution of the Communist Party of Poland and merged with the Polish Socialist Party in 1948 to form the Polish United Workers' Party. From the end of World War II the PPR governed Poland while the comprehensive Soviet control and the communist (also categorized as state socialist) system were being instituted.

<sup>55</sup> Żegota, the "Konrad Żegota Committee"—Rada Pomocy Żydom przy Delegaturze Rządu RP na Kraj—was the Polish Council to Aid Jews with the Government Delegation for Poland, an underground Polish resistance organization, and part of the Polish Underground State, active 1942–45 in German-occupied Poland. It was the successor to the Provisional Committee to Aid Jews. Operatives of Żegota worked in extreme circumstances, namely, under risk of death by the Nazi forces and often in the midst of a hostile population. Their work required extraordinary courage, and many were recognized as Righteous Among the Nations after the war.

that. They thought that as the only witness who as the last one left the Warsaw ghetto, he must survive to testify against the German crimes. Najberg himself felt the responsibility of the one who survived the ghetto and left the ghetto late. In October 1943, while sitting in the house of Szczypiorski in Bielany, he was writing down feverishly his experiences in a form of a diary. During the day, the diary was hidden on the desk underneath a heap of anti-Jewish literature that Mr. Szczypiorski brought from the town on purpose. In this way a diary of 800 pages was written. During the Warsaw uprising, Najberg buried his manuscript. After liberation he left it with certain people who were supposed to take it abroad where he also intended to go. This diary written in those horrible times was never to be seen again. Najberg claims that it's lost. Rachel Auerbach claims that the diary was destroyed on purpose for some unknown reason. After I met Najberg I suspected that the chance of him re-writing the diary was very slim. I understood that he would have had many reasons not to do it. First of all, the pain, then the loss, and now all the new life separating him from the past would prevent it. Najberg lives fully in the present life of today. Within a very short time, having only graduated from a grade school (he was only 13 when the war broke out) he received a high school diploma. At the present time he is a student at the Polytechnic Institute and works hard. At the time I contacted him, he was preparing for exams. In the nearest time, he'll be going to (October 1948) Palestine and there won't be any time for looking back at the past since he'll be immersed in other matters, and besides young people only reluctantly look back to the past; hence, I didn't count on his agreeing to testimony. But I was wrong. During one month, every day he interrupted his schedule (and I know it wasn't easy for him), forgot for a bit about his exams and about his preparation for the journey (he was supposed to leave earlier), and shared his memories that I accurately wrote down. Finally, a typed-up work of 184 pages was ready, and in it Najberg recalls the short story of what he and his family went through since 1939 till the martyr's death of those close to him. The period of actions of 1942, the experiences at Oppel at Okęcie till April, 1943, and the experiences at the Warsaw ghetto since April, 1943 till September, 1943, till the liberation. In this testimony, Najberg skips only those events that he already wrote down in his diary "Gruzowcy" so that this testimony and his diary form a unity.

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Especially valuable is the part of testimony where Najberg talks about his experiences in the Warsaw ghetto from April, 1943 till September 26, 1943. Najberg who arrived in the ghetto from Oppel right before the uprising, was no longer able to get into contact with his comrades from Haszomer-Hacair,<sup>56</sup> but joined a group not connected to ZOB.<sup>57</sup> That's why his testimony sheds a new light on the way those ordinary Jews lived and fought, how some of them wandered long after that through the burned ghetto, how they fought the Germans by terrorizing German patrols and gave their lives to the Jewish cause. I hope that by having a typed-up version of his testimony, Najberg will be willing to reconstruct his lost diary and add more details and more of his memories that should not be lost, but he didn't tell me about them because of lack of time.

During one month, Najberg came to meet me almost every day, for one or two hours dictated his memories to be typed up, sometimes he was late; he would excuse himself with a charming smile, and I couldn't be upset with him. There are people whose nobility appears in every move, every look, smile, and even in the way they walk. This young man who saw so much atrocity belongs to this category of people. He brings with himself the

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<sup>56</sup> Hashomer Hatzair also transliterated Hashomer Hatsair or HaShomer HaTzair, meaning The Young Guard was a Socialist- Zionist, secular Jewish youth movement founded in 1913 in Galicia, Austria- Hungary, and it was also the name of the group's political party in the Yishuv in the pre-1948 British Mandate of Palestine. The movement's membership base was in Eastern Europe. With the advent of World War II and the Holocaust, members of Hashomer Hatzair focused on resistance against the Nazis. Mordechaj Anielewicz, the leader of Hashomer Hatzair's Warsaw branch, became head of the Jewish Fighting Organization and one of the leaders of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising.

<sup>57</sup> Żydowska Organizacja Bojowa (ŻOB), Jewish Combat Organisation (Yid. Yidishe Kamf Organizacye) an underground organization established in Warsaw on 28 July 1942, which undertook preparations for armed resistance in the face of deportations of ghetto residents to extermination camps. ŻOB was initiated by activists of youth organizations (Ha-Szomer ha-Cair, Dror, Akiwa) Its leaders included Mordechai Anielewicz, Icchak Cukierman, Cywia Lubetkin, Mordechaj Tenenbaum, and Aryeh Wilner.

atmosphere of beauty and purity where he appears. One time he told me with his charming smile: "You know, I have a fortune to meet good people." He was simply disarming in his oblivion to his personal charm emanating from him.

## TESTIMONY OF LEON NAJBERG (alias Marian)

### Spring 1942

During spring 1942, a rumor spread that the ghetto<sup>58</sup> will cease to exist within 100 days. Jews were passing the information by word of mouth. Most

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<sup>58</sup> The Warsaw Ghetto was the largest of all the Jewish ghettos in German-occupied Europe during World War II with 400,000 Jews imprisoned in an area of 3.4 km<sup>2</sup> (1.3 sq mi). It was established by the German authorities in the Muranów neighborhood of Warsaw between October and November, 1940 in the new General Government territory of German-occupied Poland. Jews were deported from the ghetto to Nazi concentration and extermination camps. In the summer of 1942 during the Großaktion Warschau under the guise of "resettlement in the East" Ghetto residents were sent to the Treblinka extermination camp. The Germans delegated the internal administration to a Judenrat Council of the Jews, led by an "Ältester" (the Eldest), and in Warsaw this role was relegated to Adam Czerniaków, who chose a policy of collaboration with the Nazis in the hope of saving lives. The Council of Elders was supported internally by the Jewish Ghetto Police (Jüdischer Ordnungsdienst), formed at the end of September 1940, that played an instrumental role in enforcing law and order as well as carrying out German improvised regulations. The German authorities were solely responsible for the arrival of food aid, consisting usually of dry bread, flour, potatoes, turnips, and a small monthly supplement of margarine, sugar, and meat. The only real means of survival was the smuggling of food and bartering. Up to 80 percent of food consumed in the Ghetto was brought in illegally. Private workshops were created to manufacture goods to be sold secretly on the Aryan side of the city. Despite grave hardships, life in the Warsaw Ghetto had educational and cultural activities, conducted by its underground organizations.

likely Gestapo Jews brought the news from the Gestapo. Some people thought that part of population will be expelled to the East. In April/May on the premises of the central ghetto between the streets of Okopowa, Stawki, Milanowska, Bonifraterska, German offices appeared that were recruiting people to go to the East. Good working conditions were promised, and the offices required people with work tools. Those offices were located at Zelazna and Nowolipie streets where the eager workers were registered. They were told that the exact date when to report to work will be announced later.

The situation in the ghetto during the spring of 1942 improved. Thanks to the fervent work of doctors in Czysto the typhus was eliminated. At that time the doctors were fighting against tuberculosis. One could also see economic stabilization as the Jews turned from consumers into producers. Till 1939, the Jews were involved in trade and small-scale industry. In the ghetto, industry developed and prevailed. Everything was produced beginning with a spoon ending with furniture, clothing, fake jewelry, and so on. In the spring of 1942, Polish neighborhoods were the only buyers of the articles produced in the ghetto. As far as the culture is concerned, there was a revival. Sandler, Michal Znicz<sup>59</sup> would recite and sing during poetry readings and encourage to riot. This spirit was the result of the Soviet-German war. Every performance at the theater in the Dzielna Street

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<sup>59</sup> Michał Znicz was the best known of all Polish-language actors and was a star of countless interwar films. Along with other artists he was involved with five theaters functioning in the ghetto. Two of these theaters featured performances in Yiddish, Nowy Azazel (New Azazel) and Eldorado; the other three, Na Pieterku, Nowy Teatr Kameralny, and Femina in Polish. The first theater to start functioning in the ghetto was Eldorado, which opened in December 1940 and specialized in the popular genre of “pseudo-foldk” operetta and comedies. The second Yiddish-language theater, Nowy Azazel, which opened in May 1941 at Nowolipie Street 72 offered a fashionable interwar Jewish literary cabaret. The director of the theater was Chaim Sandler, a prominent interwar theater personality. For more information see Katarzyna Person, *Assimilated Jews in the Warsaw Ghetto 1940-1943*, Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2014.



began with the poem “Es wert neeh richtig warn, dar teg, es wert noch kumen mit zeire potern warn niszt blajbyn wart kajn symen.”<sup>60</sup>

Social welfare was organized. There were domestic outreach committees with organized youth groups assigned to each house that took care of poor families from each house and helped those on the brink of poverty. The youth groups helped not only materially but also morally. They were funded through charity parties and taxes levied on rich of each house. The funds raised in this way served as subsidies for the poor. The youth groups were headed, for the most part, by the youth affiliated with socialist and Zionist organizations. The youth organizations headed by people from the “golden youth” organized only dance parties and demoralized others. Youth groups were also leading self-study sessions; there were debate forums and the history of the Jewish people was taught. Those organizations took care of the orphans and during the July action,<sup>61</sup> before the terror became extreme, they hid the children, protected them from the roundups, and watched over homeless children wandering through the streets.

In May/June the notorious car-phantom taking Poles to the Pawiak prison<sup>62</sup> through the ghetto abused the Jews, as the Germans fired into the

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<sup>60</sup> It will yet become true, that day will yet come when we get rid of them with no trace remaining of that which cannot be.

<sup>61</sup> Great Action (Großaktion Warschau) was a secretive Nazi German operation of the mass extermination of Jews in the Warsaw Ghetto beginning 22 July 1942. During the Grossaktion Jews were tyrannized in daily round-ups, marched through the ghetto, and gathered at the Umschlagplatz station square for the alleged "resettlement to the East" (Umsiedlung), and transported aboard overcrowded Holocaust trains to the extermination camp in Treblinka.

<sup>62</sup> “Pawiak” prison was always known to be used not only for detaining criminals but also for political prisoners, revolutionaries, activists of independence, and those fighting for the social cause. Among the most famous Jews imprisoned there before 1939 were Rosa Luxemburg, Feliks Kon, Maksymilian Henryk Horwitz, Bronisław Grosser, Alfred Lampe and Paweł (Pinkus) Finder. After Warsaw was seized by the German army “Pawiak” became the prison of Sicherheitspolizei (Security Police) and Sicherheitsdienst (Security Service) of the Distrikt Warschau (District of

crowd. In the spring of 1942 the Jewish Ghetto Police began a great roundup of male youth.<sup>63</sup> The youth groups warned the Jewish Ghetto Police, either

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Warsaw.) The first prisoners were taken there as early as the beginning of October in 1939. Later on, “Pawiak” was subordinate to the Nazi Penal Facilities Administration Office. Jews were brought there in large numbers from the moment the ghetto was closed. From 1942 on, under a decree issued by the Reichssicherheitshauptamt (Reich Security Head Office) Jewish prisoners became subordinate exclusively to the so-called Jewish division in the Gestapo department. It was connected with the final “solution of the Jewish problem” that began that year. In July 1942, during the first ghetto’s dissolution, an incredibly large number of Jews was taken to the Pawiak. After the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising was suppressed on May 16th, 1943, the Germans focused on Jews hiding on the so-called Aryan side. They were being captured and imprisoned at Pawiak, and no record was kept of them. For more information see: Regina Domańska, *Pawiak—każń i heroism* (Pawiak – Martyrdom and Heroism) Warszawa: Książka i Wiedza, 1988.

<sup>63</sup> The Jewish Ghetto Police or Jewish Police Service (Jüdischer Ordnungsdienst, Żydowska Służba Porządkowa) also called the Jewish Police by Jews, were auxiliary police units organized within the Jewish ghettos of German-occupied Poland by local Judenrat (Jewish council) collaborating with the German Nazis and employed chiefly for securing the deportation of other Jews to the concentration camps, but their work involved ensuring public order in the ghetto. The duties of the Jewish police can be divided into these categories: directing traffic in the streets, supervising garbage collection and clearing snow and dirt off the streets, supervising sanitation in the buildings, preventing crime and operating a kind of court that served as an “arbiter” in disputes that arose in the ghetto. The members were recruited from two separate groups; the first group consisted of Jewish lawyers, disbarred by the German occupiers, and the second was recruited from among pre-War Jewish organized crime groups. The Polish-Jewish historian and Warsaw Ghetto archivist Emanuel Ringelblum has described the cruelty of the ghetto Jewish police as at times greater than that of the Germans, the Ukrainians and the Latvians. See Isaiah Trunk, *The Jewish Councils in Eastern Europe under Nazi Occupation*, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1972.

through leaflets or anonymous letters not to be so subserviently overzealous in their work. Unfortunately, these appeals had no effect since thanks to their overzealousness during the spring of 1942, 12,000 young people were taken to forced labor camps in Lubelskie Voivodship. Letters arrived only from some of those taken away, but not from others so that there was no news from hundreds of people. The life in the ghetto went on as if everything were normal, but there was fear hanging in the air. The people of the ghetto were expecting something, but there was nothing that could prepare them for the tragedy of July 22, 1942. At midnight, the Germans dragged out all the social activists from their apartments and shot them in the streets leaving the corpses lying there till the next morning. This action caused horror in the ghetto. All those working in clandestine organizations needed to leave their homes and live in hiding, and all the ghetto was in a state of shock after the Germans, for the first time, openly shot fifty people. Among those shot were also the doormen who did not manage to open the door fast enough and casual people who were visiting those for whom the Germans came. The fear paralyzed everyone for a while, but as the time passed in order to console themselves, the inhabitants of the ghetto concluded that the people that were shot were social activists and ordinary citizens were not in danger.

During that memorable spring of 1942, a group of filmmakers with a special technical equipment arrived at the ghetto. The Germans were filming the ghetto. The operators would catch people in the streets and film in a specific way so as to show the low moral standards of the Jews while at the same time demonstrate the genuine moments of the ghetto life.

For instance, such a scene: Szulc restaurant<sup>64</sup> at the corner of Karmelicka street and Nowolipie. “A hundred” ruling the ghetto are sitting at tables set with delicacies, southern fruit, while there is a child lying on the threshold and dying of hunger. “Those good people” would sometimes summon up their empathy to buy a sheet of paper in order to cover the dead body.

The cameramen filmed refugee homes, that is, the “collection points.” The refugees stayed on public properties, in schools, and in

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<sup>64</sup> For additional information about Szulc restaurant in the ghetto see: Marian Apfelbaum, *Return to the Warsaw Ghetto*, Jerusalem: Geffen, 2007.

synagogues, in the Paris hall, where earlier weddings took place, and in warehouses, which were transferred into refugee camps for the former inhabitants of the left bank Vistula River region expelled in 1941 to Warsaw. Those buildings belonged to the Pinkert<sup>65</sup> division where for the most part all the inhabitants died of hunger and filth. Many times the inhabitants could not pay the transport to the cemetery. Thus a new system of burial developed. After the curfew, the family would undress the corpse, take it to the street, and leave it in a doorway somewhere. Almost every street in the ghetto had a privileged doorway-cemetery from which the corpses did not disappear.

There were factories working for the Rüstungskommando<sup>66</sup> in the ghetto, and till July 1942 those who worked there were either trained workmen who till 1939 owned their own businesses or were hired. When the poverty affected people at the ghetto, many for just the want of the factory soup went to work there. They worked 10-12 hours a day, earning a soup, a slice of bread, and from time to time a pittance of money. Those were the disreputable factories of Többens and Schultz.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Pinkert was the head of the burial society. For more information see: Yitzhak ("Antek") Zuckerman, *A Surplus of Memory: Chronicle of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising*, translated and edited by Barbara Harshav, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993.

<sup>66</sup> Armaments Command

<sup>67</sup> Többens and Schultz was a Nazi German textile manufacturing conglomerate making German uniforms, socks and garments in the Warsaw Ghetto and elsewhere, during the occupation of Poland in World War II. It was owned and operated by two major war profiteers: Fritz Emil Schultz from Danzig, and a convicted war criminal, Walter C. Többens who came to Warsaw in the summer of 1941 after the Ghetto was closed off and the unemployment, hunger and malnutrition were rampant. They opened their own factories in the Ghetto using slave labor on a record scale since some 15,000 Jews were working for the company in the Warsaw Ghetto, at the Prosta Street and at the Leszno Street factories among other places. For more information see: Michal Grynberg, *Words to Outlive Us. Eyewitness Accounts from the Warsaw Ghetto*, NY: Picador.

## July 1942

July, 1942. Starting on July 15, there was an oppressive atmosphere in the ghetto. People were nervously awaiting something, but they had no idea what would happen. Some thought that a forced labor ordinance would be issued. Others claimed that children would not receive rations. Rumors were circulating that the collection points would be moved to the East for farming. The Jews believed that they will be able to avoid the unknown disaster with bribes. But on July 17-18, 19 the usually busy Jewish street Zelazna and the narrow passage of Chlodna street, the corner of Zelazna were if extinct (this street connected the two parts of the ghetto, and at its crossing with Chlodna, belonging to the Aryan side, there was a so-called "merry-go-round." This was a movable gate that was opened and closed in order to change the flow of the vehicles alternating between the Jewish and Aryan ones. Pedestrians were able to use a wooden two-story bridge that connected the small ghetto with the big ghetto). Here it was rare to hear cars beeping and even still rarer to see any cars because there were none at the ghetto. When in these streets cars appeared, the streets became noisy with beeping, and the Jews knew that the blood-thirsty German Moloch arrived with its new plans for the new fodder. Till now, after each visit of Goering, Goebbels or other German dignitaries, there were new ordinances, bans, orders to be implemented that were cutting the ghetto to the quick. And so it was the same this time. The appearance of several SS dignitaries with the skull and crossed bones insignia in convertibles with the roofs down signified a misfortune to the Jews. The Jews suspected the anticipated catastrophe. When the cars were approaching Judenrat on Grzybowska Street the traffic on that very street stopped completely. However, a crowd formed in front of the Judenrat building since everyone was awaiting the news while the SS soldiers were guarding the entrance.

On July 18, the councilman Sztolzman spoke to the crowds assuring everyone that there was no danger and all people should go back to their homes otherwise the Germans might think that the gathering is a provocation. On that day nobody was admitted to the Judenrat. Throngs of people were waiting at the corner of Ciepla i Grzybowska streets behind the Judenrat wanting to know what was awaiting them. During this time the ghetto stopped working. It was difficult to buy anything at the stores, trading

of goods ceased, and all food products became more expensive. Everyone was possessed by one thought: "What are they going to do with us?" The answer to this question came very quickly. On July 21 after the meeting at the Judenrat, the cars were on their way back on Zelazna Street. It was a mere coincidence that revealed the long-awaited answer. At the corner of Elektoralna and Zelazna streets, a piece of plaster fell off the building right next to one of the SS cars. They stopped immediately, entered the house, pulled out twelve men they found in different apartments, and shot them dead on the spot. It was the first indication of what was to come.

In the morning, the wall surrounding the ghetto was staffed with szaulisy,<sup>68</sup> Ukrainians, paramilitary units, military police, and special police units with grenades. Inside the ghetto, all the exits into the Aryan neighborhoods, which till now had two military soldiers, two police guards, and one Jewish Police member as guards changed dramatically. Now the SS, the SA, and the NSDAP soldiers, pilots, and Wehrmacht soldiers were standing guard.

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<sup>68</sup> The Lithuanian Riflemen's Union or LRU (Lietuvos šaulių sąjunga) also referred to as šauliai (šaulys for rifleman) was a paramilitary non-profit organization supported by the State. The activities are in three main areas: military training, sport and culture. By 1940 the LRU had become one of the most popular and largest organizations in the country, with about 62,000 members. Both men and women were active in the organization with units of university students and many famous politicians, artists, and other members of the cultural elite that were active in the union. On 15 June 1940, the Soviet Union occupied Lithuania, and the riflemen, like the rest of the military, were ordered not to resist. On 13 July 13, 1940 a Soviet order to liquidate the union was issued and in subsequent months, a number of the most active riflemen were arrested as "enemies of the people" and sent to various Gulag camps. During the Nazi occupation, ex-riflemen formed several underground organizations, such as Laisvės šauliai (Freedom's Riflemen), aimed at restoring Lithuania's independence. There is, however, evidence that between July 1941 and August 1944 Lithuanian Nazi collaborators (Shaulists) were involved in the Ponary massacre, the execution of tens of thousands of Jews and Soviet prisoners of war in forests close to the village of Paneriai, near Vilnius.

The ghetto was hermetically sealed in order to fulfill Goebbels' standpoint, who wrote in *Völkischer Beobachter*: "Die Totenkiste—Ghetto Warschau."<sup>69</sup> The outer appearance of the ghetto changed radically. In the streets of the ghetto, Jewish Police appeared and confiscated all trucks, horse-drawn wagons, and rickshaws. On July 22, I noticed, while at the corner of Chlodna and Zelazna streets, that the Jewish Police took away all the begging children sitting on the curbs near the gutters and put them on heavy duty wagons pulled by horses. A few steps away a woman with a child was passing by. The Jewish Police wanted to take away the child, but the woman gave out an unearthly scream, and some men came running to help. They pulled the child out of their hands and returned it to the mother.

The news about rounding up the children spread like wildfire in the ghetto. The screams of mothers looking for their children echoed around the houses. People locked themselves in the apartments. Mothers were making threats against Jewish Police and swearing at them. The Jewish Police did not give out any information about why the children were being captured. Everyone thought that it was a roundup of the begging children that would be then transported to the Jewish jail and taken to orphanages. No ghetto inhabitants expected that these children are to be displaced to the East to do the farm work. Till the evening hours, 6 o'clock, the action of rounding up was taking place; however, that day Jewish Police was unable to take away any children from their mothers.

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<sup>69</sup> The box of death—Warsaw Ghetto

Next day the new mysterious words were heard: "Umschlagplatz"<sup>70</sup> – "Aussiedlungskommando."<sup>71</sup>

During the first day of action on July 22, 1942, the Germans removed in a brutal way the occupants of the houses at Zelazna 101 and 103 and confiscated their apartments with the belongings. In those houses, the headquarters of the deportation staff, were installed, that is, Aussiedlungskommando, under the leadership of Obersturmführer<sup>72</sup> and Hauptsturmführer<sup>73</sup> SS: Handtke, Klostermayer, Blescher, Brandt, Konrad, Michelsohn, and others. This staff arrived from Lublin where it had become "famous" and gained experience in expulsions and eliminating Jews. This

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<sup>70</sup> Umschlagplatz (collection point or reloading point) was a holding area set up by Nazi Germany adjacent to a railway station in occupied Poland, where the Jews from the ghetto were collected for deportation to death camps during the ghetto liquidation. During the Grossaktion Warsaw, which began on 22 July 1942, Jews were deported in crowded freight cars to Treblinka twice daily, in the early morning and in mid-afternoon. The Warsaw Umschlagplatz was constructed by fencing off a western part of the Warszawa Gdańska freight train station that was adjacent to the ghetto. Railway buildings, a former homeless shelter, and a hospital were converted into a prisoner selection facility. The rest of the train station served its regular purpose for the remainder of the inhabitants during the deportations.

<sup>71</sup> Resettlement Commando

<sup>72</sup> "Obersturmführer" was a Nazi party paramilitary rank that was used in several Nazi organizations, such as the SA, SS, NSKK and the NSFK. Translated as "senior assault (or storm) leader", 2009 the rank of "Obersturmführer" was first created in 1932 as the result of an expansion of the "Sturmabteilung" (SA) and the need for an additional rank in the officer corps. "Obersturmführer" also became an SS rank at that same time. "SA-Obersturmführer" was typically a junior company commander in charge of between 50-100 soldiers.

<sup>73</sup> Hauptmann is a Captain in standard military ranks.



staff was the first one to run the portable gas chambers (in vans). Already in 1941, the Germans poisoned in them the Jews from Lubelskie Voivodship.

On July 23, I went with a friend to the Jewish prison, the so-called Gęsiówka.<sup>74</sup> In that prison my friend's eleven-year-old brother was detained because he got caught in an act of crime of buying bread in the Polish neighborhood. It was Adas T. The friend was communicating with his brother through the window bars that were overlooking the front of Gęsia Street. The brother told my friend with a great joy that he had been told that they would be transferred to Lubelskie Voivodship where the boys will be assigned to groups for cattle grazing. Adas was happy to leave the jail. That very day, July 22-23, the prisoners were moved to the Umschlagplatz, and they were gladly and joyously leaving the walls of prison believing in improving their life. There were about 1600 people in the prison, 70% of them children up to 16 year old, of both sexes.

Since July 22, getting across from the small ghetto to the big one was as if getting through a front line. The area was fenced in with a barbed wire along the Walice Street and was guarded by the Ukrainians and paramilitary units under the supervision of German military police. German underlings<sup>75</sup> wanting to show off their subservience and dedication to the Germans shot at Jewish passersby in the area of Grzybowska and Zelazna streets near the exit. The Jews were terrorized by the shooting of German guards and Ukrainians so that getting from the big ghetto to the small one depended on the mood of those guarding those areas. There was no other connection between the two ghettos. The Jews were thus cut off from each other so that those living in Twarda Street did not know what was going on in Leszno and the other way around. In the beginning, only Jewish Police was in charge of the roundups. In the small ghetto there was a group from Jewish Police who would go to the gathering at the military headquarters in Ogrodowa Street. They would receive the orders where to go for roundups. In the first days of this action, Lewinson after receiving his orders would come to our house in Panska Street 48 (he lived there too) to let us know

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<sup>74</sup> It was a Jewish prison supervised by Jewish Police – the former military prison in the buildings on the corner of Lubecki and Zamenhof streets

<sup>75</sup> Polish paramilitary in German service

where the Jewish Police would be working. He did that only during the first days.

In the ghetto, the new buzzwords and slogans become fashionable: “Ausweis,”<sup>76</sup> “Arbeitskarte,”<sup>77</sup> “Nutz-Jude”<sup>78</sup> because documents so called are supposed to protect you from roundups and deportations. The struggle for factories begins. Every inhabitant of the ghetto tries persistently to get on the list of laborers employed in factories working for the Rüstungskommando. The same situation is with the “Nutz-Jude” since a document like this has a bonding force and protects the holder. For the first time Jewish families are divided. Oftentimes the wife gets into one factory and the husband into a different one, and the older children yet into a different one. Families are divided according to the so-called good factories that are supposed to be protected from the deportation. The Jews give away their machinery, businesses, and money to the acquainted Germans Volksdeutsche<sup>79</sup> in order to save their families. On many buildings appear signs in German: “Dieser Betrieb arbeitet für Rüstungskommando.”<sup>80</sup> These signs were meant to protect people working in these factories. The Jews are trying to use their last resources to get the factories going as fast as possible to prove that they are productive.

During the third day of action, in the streets of the ghetto orders appear declaring deportations to the East of those who are labeled as “unproductive people.” Those excluded from the deportation are the workers of Judenrat, members of the Jewish Police, workers of the emergency services, employees of the office against the usury, and all the blue- and white-collar workers employed by the factories working for the

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<sup>76</sup> Identification Card

<sup>77</sup> Work Permit

<sup>78</sup> Useful Jew

<sup>79</sup> Volksdeutsche were ethnic Germans regardless of citizenship. These terms were used by the Nazis to define Germans on the basis of their race rather than citizenship and consequently included Germans living beyond the borders of the Reich, as long as they were not of Jewish origin.

<sup>80</sup> The factory works for the Armament Commando

Rüstungskommando. Every ghetto resident interpreted these orders as having the power to protect those with appropriate job agreements from being deported. This was an opportunity for the “Aryan” business managers and their Jewish helpers to collect high fees for getting on the list of the employees. In the ghetto the hostility between the poor and the rich emerges. Some skilled Jewish workers employed (till the July action) in Többens and Schultz factories are fired and replaced with unskilled workers that are paid less.

During the first days, the action was moving slowly. The people in the streets had only their identification cards checked, and those employed by the factories working for the Rüstungskommando were automatically exempted. This situation caused the fees for getting on the desired employment lists to grow higher and higher from day to day.

On July 23, the Jewish Police pulled up to Grzybowski Square 2 where the deportation house was located and took away several families with filled to the brim horse-pulled wagons. When this procession was passing Twarda Street 5 where the pastry shop Madera was located, and merciful people were bringing out bread for those being taken away, the deportees remarked: “When our children were dying of hunger, we didn’t receive any bread, but now before death you are feeding us bread.” These deportees were swollen because of hunger; what a misery.

The hunger was spreading throughout the ghetto, and the most affected were the poor ones; the smugglers come from that social class since that was the way they were able to support themselves by smuggling the goods from the “Aryan” side to the ghetto. In the last days of the action they ceased to exist. From day to day, the situation was getting more difficult. After eight days of action there were no products arriving into the ghetto from the outside. The only source of food for the ghetto (for the poor masses because the rich people had reserves) were Polish workers that were employed by Polish factories in the ghetto and which were not evacuated to the Polish neighborhood, for example, the factory of Konrad Jarnieszkiewicz on Grzybowska Street that employed 50 Polish workers. The Poles employed in those factories had a special permission to enter and exit the ghetto. They would take breakfast or a loaf of bread to work that they would sell for about 700% of a profit; this way a true trafficking developed right next to the German guard post at the corner of Chlodna and Zelazna. The poorest people would get involved in these deals and buy bread and rolls in order to sell them to other poor Jews and earn money for their own food.

The procedure of action changed from day to day. After the liquidation of the deportation house at the Umschlagplatz, the Jewish Police had an order to take away everybody on welfare. In this action, Jewish horse trams were used, the so-called Kohn-Heller.<sup>81</sup> This time the action is conducted according to the list with the names of those on welfare. Horse tram pulls up to the house. The agents enter the building, find the address, give the residents a few minutes to gather their belongings. Many times, one can see bundles with bedding, suitcases, and parcels flying out the windows. These are the candidates for deportation to the East who are saving their possessions. And later? Later the Jewish Police loads everybody and everything on the horse tram and takes it to the Umschlagplatz. After the residents have been taken away, the apartments must remain unlocked. It happens many times that a husband is at work or a child is playing somewhere in the street. The family is taken to the Umschlagplatz while the “lucky” one comes to the empty dark apartment.

However, the ghetto doesn’t get depressed, the ghetto believes, the people console each other. They make excuses for what they see; that those being deported would die of hunger anyhow: “But these are the poorest ones.” Everyone is waiting longingly for the action to end.

The youth organizations try to awaken everyone’s vigilance. During the third day of action, the leaflets prepared by Hashomer-Hacair<sup>82</sup> appear and instruct people not to believe the Germans and resist the Jewish Police. The leaflets call to resistance, to sabotage of German ordinances and explain that the way to the Umschlagplatz leads to certain death. Having seen the leaflets, the Jews believe that this is the provocation of Gestapo, who want to lure the Jews to rebel against the Germans. This will give the German a pretext for some new action, and the opinion of the world will be summed

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<sup>81</sup> This name originates from the names of the persons who received the license for the transit company.

<sup>82</sup> From Hebrew “a young guardian.” During the Holocaust, members of Hashomer Hatzair concentrated on resistance against the Nazis. Mordechai Anielewicz, the leader of Hashomer Hatzair's in Warsaw branch, became head of the Jewish Fighting Organization and one of the leaders of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising.

up as follows: the rebellion of the ghetto. The people don't want to know the truth; they want to be lied to.

No person who can think rationally is able to allow this thought that the Germans are ready to murder almost half a million of Warsaw ghetto inhabitants. The youth organization, like Haszomer-Hacair, gives orders to their members to inform people that they need to hide during the roundups and not to willingly report to the Umschlagplatz. However, often it happens that the Jews throw these young people out of their apartments and call them provocateurs. One does not want to allow the thought that one is in danger of extinction.

During the first days of action, a watershed moment that affected many in the ghetto was the suicide of Engineer Czerniakow, the chairman of the Judenrat. The ghetto commented on his behavior as being a mixture of his weakness, the extreme terror of the Germans, and the pressure to speed up the action of the ghetto deportation to which he did not want to agree. Unfortunately, nobody realized that his suicide was an act of protest against the complete destruction of the Warsaw ghetto. At least I never heard anyone talking in those terms about his suicide. After his death, there was a commotion at the ghetto, but it was toned down by other developments.

The place of Czerniakow is taken by Lichtenbaum, and on the fourth day of the action an order signed by Lejkin appears about the formation of ancillary deportation forces: Aussiedlungsdienst,<sup>83</sup> recruited from the workers of Judenrat, emergency services, --"13-th," an agency for disinfection, and other social institutions cooperating with the Judenrat. Those people received the armbands with the word Aussiedlungsdienst printed on them and for a few days were helpful to the Jewish Police because more people were deported. There was a visible difference in carrying out the action now since it was not as slow as before because virtually all ghetto residents were affected now as if scourged with a whip.

For the first time, the blockade of houses began that looked like this. The Jewish Police with one of the officers would enter the courtyard and give the order to all the residents to gather there and to have their work cards inspected that allow them to remain in the ghetto. The particular house, the gate, and the adjacent part of the street were surrounded by a chain of people from Aussiedlungsdienst who wouldn't let anyone out, however, anyone could enter the house and the circle. After the document inspection

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<sup>83</sup> Resettlement Commission

was completed and the illegal residents were set apart from the rest, that is, were selected, the Jewish Police along with the members of Aussiedlungsdienst surrounded those “illegal” and “unproductive” people and rushed them to the Umschlagplatz. Apparently German orders were given faster than the action was able to be carried out since the whole streets were now blocked. Admittedly the documents issued by certain German factories and work cards with the seal of Arbeitsamt confirming that the person was useful in the ghetto were still honored; however, the action affected now everyone. Yet this time the lack of empathy was striking. So for example, the inhabitants of Nalewki Street were happy that the action was taking place on the Niska Street because only suspicious people lived there, who “sooner or later would have starved to death anyhow.” I only quote them as an example because such utterances were heard at every turn in the ghetto.

If during the first days of action you could see a one horse-drawn wagon filled with children or deportees sneaking in and hiding as if ashamed escorted by the Jewish Police to the Umschlagplatz and some groups of German Jews heading – either happily or indifferently – to the Umschlagplatz with their wives, children, and belongings brought to the ghetto in 1941, in the following days the, “chosen ones” to be deported looked much different. The multitude of the unfortunate ones was growing – their faces sad, scared, terrorized. You could hear their groans, cries, screams, and laments drowning out the noises of their marching. The victims marched in columns sneaking glances at the ghetto streets and at the same time thinking that they will return ...

A helpful strategy used during the action was the perfidiously sophisticated use of propaganda: there were news being spread and whispered in the name of the Jewish Police, Judenrat, or the Germans. Other means of deception were also used. Till the day of action, the mail arrived to the ghetto irregularly; however, during the action the letters were delivered very quickly. Those were the first letters of the evacuees written to their families. In them, they were trying to convince the family members to pack up and leave because there were opportunities to settle down and work, and if they put it off, it will get more difficult because of the inflow of new people.

Because often it was concluded that those letters were authentic and from the children to their parents or from the husbands to their wives, etc., a new motto became popular in the ghetto: “Those who get to the

Umschlagplatz first, will have it better.” Such letters were sent from the Lublin area, Trawniki, Poniatowa, Belzec,<sup>84</sup> where – as we found out later – the Germans set up concentration camps.

The action was under way. The Jews seemed to get accustomed to the daily routine of the Jewish Police. The ghetto knew that the action was being carried out from 7 a.m. till 5 or 6 p.m. Afterward the streets returned to their normal appearance from the day before the action. There was a great rush. People’s minds were preoccupied with looking for food. The hunger was taking a toll. The supply plant made some goods available: canned cabbage, beets, and carrots, all preserved in vinegar. These cans were banned by the physicians till the day of action because such food had been considered a poison. During the hunger days of action, however, these products were in great demand and were allocated in restricted number to provision stores so that long lines formed, and people stood waiting for hours to get their rations. The authorities figured out that they could make their work easier and instead of taking people from their houses they could round up all the hungry and take them from in front of the store to the Umschalplatz.

The action was getting more intense, and the methods changed. People walked around agitated and angry. The Jews would start a system of hiding in different holes and attics. Everybody waited for the evening hours in order to go outside, find out what the news were, and then together in a group think about the fate of the Jews. The ghetto got already used to all the surprises. And it was really strange how sometimes after the action was finished, suddenly some enthusiastic people would run in the streets and spread the news about it being the last day of action. The streets of the ghetto would burst with joy spontaneously so that people not acquainted with each other would hug each other and think this is the end of the tragedy. These news were spread usually at the same time all over the ghetto, but in the following days it turned out that it was a staged trick that worked on the gullible people, and all those enthusiastic crowds were taken away to places with no return.

In the last days of July, the deportation action was taken over by the Germans. In charge were Hauptsturmführer Brandt and Konrad, who were helped by the squads of degenerated Ukrainians, paramilitary and the Jewish

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<sup>84</sup> Slave labor, concentration, and extermination camps

Police.<sup>85</sup> From the first moment of the action, the Germans used awful terror that was demonstrated by the murders, by the constant uproar of shots, and by different ordinances and rules, which always ended with the solemn sentence: „Non-compliance equals the death penalty.“ When the action became the German initiative it was carried out using surprise tactics. It was difficult to tell who was targeted. The official papers issued by the Germans in the morning would lose their validity in the afternoon. After a few days of action, the slogan „D.S.“ (Dobrze sie schowac/it's good to hide) became popular. The struggle for official documents continued. Some people thought that documents with the signature „SS“ were better than the ones with the signature „SA.“ All were trying to get the documents with the latest date in order to extend their stay in the ghetto. While the Germans were conducting the action, the situation became more brutal, and the Jewish Police was degraded to the role of the auxiliary help who opened the locked apartments, attics, and basements with their crowbars and axes when searching for those in hiding.

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<sup>85</sup> The German task force consisted of 821 Waffen-SS paramilitary soldiers and training battalions, one SS cavalry reserve, and training battalion. The other forces were drawn from the Ordnungspolizei (Orpo) order police, Warsaw personnel of the Gestapo and Sicherheitsdienst (SD) intelligence service, one battalion each from two Wehrmacht (Heer) railroad combat engineers regiments, a Wehrmacht battery of anti-aircraft artillery, a detachment of multinational (commonly but inaccurately referred to by the Germans and Jews alike as "Ukrainians," ex-Soviet POW "Trawniki-Männer" auxiliary camp guards trained by the SS at Trawniki concentration camp, and technical emergency corps. Additionally several Gestapo jailers from the political prison Pawiak led by Franz Bürkl, volunteered to join the "hunt" for the Jews. A force of 363 officers from the Polish Police of the General Government (so-called Blue Police) was ordered by the Germans to cordon the walls of the ghetto. Warsaw fire department personnel were also forced to help in the operation. Jewish policemen were used in the first phase of the ghetto's liquidation and subsequently summarily executed by the Gestapo. See the Stroop Report <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/the-stroop-report-may-1943>

"World War II: Warsaw Ghetto Uprising." Historynet.com. R



The „honorable“ work of catching and murdering the Jews was left to the Germans who systematically blocked the streets of whole neighborhoods. The territory of the action was then closed off with a chain formed by the Ukrainians in the full-battle gear with the bayonets on the rifles. Inside of that closed circle, Ukrainians, paramilitary, and the Jewish Police under the command of German officers were doing their job. You could hear the scream: „Alle Juden herunter!“ <sup>86</sup>All the residents of those houses who did not report in the courtyard were directed to the street where Ukrainians had them form into ranks and guarded them so that nobody could escape. But this was not the end of the action at this courtyard. After a few minutes when nobody else appeared, the officer – German ordered Ukrainians and the Jewish Police to search all the apartments, basements, and attics. Ukrainians during the first days carried out the orders cowardly demolishing all the closed apartments, attics, basements, and stores, and all the Jews found regardless of their age or sex were shot to death on the spot. Initially the selection was done according to order because the documents held by the selected were honored. Later keeping order turned into fiction because leaving the selected group depended on chance not on the kind of documents you had. And, for example, some honored documents signed by Toebeans<sup>87</sup>, other those by Schultz, still others just looked at the hands (if someone's hands were dirty, they were let go free because they were thought to be a worker). Still others chose to free pretty young girls. There were also cases when they would let midgets go free in order to catch them the next day. Many times Ukrainians would find a family in hiding, take a payoff, rape the daughter in front of the mother, and then shoot everyone in the end. To rare cases belonged taking a big payoff and leaving the victims where they lived.

The Germans and Volksdeutsche who lived in the Polish neighborhood and had their businesses or warehouses there realized that

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<sup>86</sup> All the Jews come down here!

<sup>87</sup> Többens and Schultz was a Nazi German textile manufacturing conglomerate making German uniforms, socks, and garments in the Warsaw Ghetto and elsewhere during the occupation of Poland in World War II. It was owned and operated by two major war profiteers: Fritz Emil Schultz from Danzig and a convicted war criminal Walter C. Többens from Hamburg.

they can have free workers. In agreement with the Arbeitsamt<sup>88</sup>, they came to the ghetto and formed so-called outposts, that is, work points from which the people were picked up to be brought to those businesses and dropped off there (although some such points have existed but there were just a few of them, and the Jews were leaving the ghetto unwillingly to go work for the Germans). Young people and those who didn't have the right documents or were not assigned to shops inside the ghetto went to those points eagerly. If you worked there, you were protected from the roundups during the day, and on your way home you could buy some potatoes, vegetables, or a loaf of bread from the Polish neighborhood in the evening. Those who had families and were working outside of ghetto would hide their families in primitive hideouts masking and closing off the entrance and after work opening it and letting the families out. Many times those people would find empty hideouts after coming back from work.

In general, this delusional happiness of being safe from the roundups did not last long. The Germans did not have set hours for the action. They carried out the roundups at random hours during the day and always came as a big surprise. Often the wagons at the Umschlagplatz were still empty, and there were no more people to be found on a particular day – then the Ukrainians would stand at the ghetto entrance and direct the Jews returning from the work outside of the ghetto to the Umschlagplatz. Those people were happy to have brought some food for their families and trusted that the action won't affect them. When the Ukrainians surrounded them, they thought that it was just a matter of separating them from the group being taken to the Umschlagplatz. But the direction and the route to Stawki Street made the horrible reality clear for them in the last minute.

The horse-pulled wagons need to be mentioned too because they were used for the action during the day. In the afternoon they would be active on the route from Ciepla to Solna streets, that is, they connected the small ghetto with the big one. Civilian population gladly took advantage of this means of transportation till the day when the Germans stealthily hid themselves near Chlodna Street and stopped each passing wagon only to take all the passengers with them. From that day on the small ghetto had almost no contact with the big one. People were scared to use this transportation service.

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<sup>88</sup> Employment Agency

Approximately in the middle of August when the hunger was at its worse for almost all, an ordinance appeared on the walls of the ghetto that if the Jews report willingly to the Umschlagplatz, they will receive three kilos of bread and a box of artificial honey, and that the families won't be separated. Hundreds of people went voluntarily to the Umschlagplatz. So many people fell for this trickery that there were not enough wagons to take them all away, and some of them returned home. Supposedly this time there were bags with bread that were put on the wagons.

At the end of August, the Germans gave an order to leave the area of small ghetto between Chlodna, Walicow, Krochmalna, Rynbkowa, Grzybowski Square Senna, and Zelazna streets till 5 p.m. that very day. People were gathering the most necessary items and went by foot over the wooden bridge to the big ghetto. Only a few lucky ones were able to get a rickshaw or a handcart on which they put their belongings. The passage from the small to the big ghetto was congested the whole day, and the throngs of people heading to the big ghetto was being captured by the Germans at Zelazna, Chlodna, Elektoralna, and Leszno streets. The Germans sorted the people into columns and rushed them to the Umschlagplatz. Only a few were able to hide. That day in the gutters of Chlodna street, Jewish blood was flowing like rivers – it was the blood of Jews who tried to escape. All day long without a pause, rickshaws with the wounded and Pinkert<sup>89</sup> wagons with the corpses were hastening. Crowds of powerless, tormented, and terrorized Jews marched passively towards the Umschlagplatz. The Germans started to introduce some kind of “order” so that going one step ahead of everyone meant getting a beating with the barrel of a gun or being shot to death on the spot. Some carrying a heavy load couldn't keep up with the others marching but didn't want to part with their belongings. When they were lagging behind, the Ukrainians shot them to death. As the action progressed. The marching people would leave their heavy load along the way in order to keep up.

Those who still had some material funds, machinery, or connections got into various factories and shops that during the first ten or twelve days of

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<sup>89</sup> Pinkert funeral home

action were protected and thus avoided the selection and deportation. Till the end of July, it was sufficient to have an ID card from the shop, come to work, and sit during the day at the machine pretending to be a worker in order to be able to go back home at night. Later the factories were surrounded by a fence and those not registered were not able to stay close. Those registered were given a room attached to the factory. This way Toebbens's factory developed that occupied the area between the streets: Zelazna, Panska, Twards, Ciepla, and Ceglana. The area of the small ghetto was surrounded by the wall. But inside there was nobody left apart from Toebbens's workers. All the stores were vandalized and wide open; the products were lying on the streets. The apartments were still full of furniture, and all the goods, but the residents were gone or – as it often was the case when the owners were still inside – there were corpses. Many people committed suicide by opening gas. After the people left, the area of the small ghetto looked like after a horrible pogrom.

After some time, Befehlstelle<sup>90</sup> came up with the new job task for the Jews called Werterfassung.<sup>91</sup> This new institution took care of the property left in the houses for the Germans by taking the things out from the empty apartments left by the victims. The apartments were emptied out and, with German accuracy, sorted and put away to special warehouses. Most likely those goods were sent to Germany. The workers at factories were assured that their families located in the area of the factory wouldn't be taken away. Again, the Germans lied to them. When men or women were at work, and their family members or workers from the night shift were in their apartments waiting for them, the Germans entered the factory area and took away many to the Umschlagplatz. Many times, the Germans would do the selection right at the factory among the workers. They were pulled away from their machines, after a fictitious selection, and taken away to the Umschlagsplatz.

In the meantime, the Germans started to liquidate most factories, which had been opened recently, leaving only the privileged ones. The liquidation was sudden, without notifying the owners so that nobody was able to hide. Later the remaining factories were consolidated into a few

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<sup>90</sup> Command Post

<sup>91</sup> Asset Acquisition

bigger ones so that they were like islands isolated by the walls. These were: the factory of brushes along Bonifraterska, Franciszkanska, Wolowa, and Swietojska streets; Brauner on Nalewki 36; “Transawia” (production of airplane parts) on Stawki Street; Toebbens and Schulz along Leszno, Karmelicka. Nowolipie, and Smocza streets; Halmana (carpentry shop) at Smocza and Nowolipki streets; “Ostdeutsche BauTischlerei” on Gesia 75-79, and several houses utilized by the company Ostman. A few apartments were still occupied by the Jews in hiding who didn’t have the special work permit. The Jewish Police moved to Zamenhofa Street, and the number of people serving diminished since they had been taken to the Umschlagplatz.

At the end of July, I went to the Jewish Arbeitsamt<sup>92</sup> (managed by the German, Cygler) in order to get a seal on my work permit. The seal “Nutz-Jude” was supposed to prevent deportation. Suddenly the Jewish Police appeared and took all the people waiting there (apart from the clerks) to the Umschlagplatz. Before they were taken away, one of the clerks, Openheim, gave to all the young men the voluntary job reassignment to Wehrmacht<sup>93</sup> that was supposed to protect you from the Umschlagplatz deportation. That day the Jewish Police received a directive to bring to the Umschlagplatz five “heads” each. It was more difficult now to catch the Jews in the streets of the ghetto. Young Jews were in the factories (where the Jewish Police didn’t conduct selections on their own), and everyone else was in hiding. The zeal of the Jewish Police members escalated to the point that oftentimes they would open up the hiding places and drag people out. If they didn’t deliver, they would lose their privileges, which meant losing also their families, that is, wives and children (this did not apply to other family relationships), and the daily rations of bread.

I arrived at the Umschlagplatz at noon. The day was hot. In the area surrounded from the outside with a 4-meters-high wall a few thousand people were gathered. From the outside, the wall was encircled by the Ukrainians. The only exit was leading to the Polish neighborhood on Dzika Street (only from there you could enter the ghetto). Next to the exit there were some SS officers standing, and along Zamenhof Street till Stawki inside the wall there was a unit of the SS men, the Ukrainians, and the Jewish Police

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<sup>92</sup> Jewish Employment Agency

<sup>93</sup> German Armed Forces

with Lejkin and Szmerling<sup>94</sup> who welcomed us by hitting us everywhere and rushing us behind the barbed wire. The wire was inside the square, and there was only one narrow passage. People were lying on the ground broken next to their bundles while the Ukrainians passed by and every so often hit them with their whips for fun. Women stood crying and staring with their maddened gaze at the gate looking for their husbands or children.

They cry of children was mixed with the wailing of women and the screams of men being tortured. The heat was unbearable, and it was impossible to get water. The square kept being filled with the new arrivals till it came to a crucial point. People were so compressed together that they met their physiological needs of waste elimination right where they stood or sat. All were asking with their eyes: "What are they going to do with us?" The answer to this question came soon enough.

The Umschlagplatz had its own good aspects. At that time, it was the only place where the son would find his father again, or the mother her lost child. They would find each other after a few hours, days, or weeks of being apart only to enter the one or two-hour-long journey of thorns to eternity.

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<sup>94</sup> Jakub Lejkin was a Polish lawyer of Jewish descent, deputy commander subordinate to the Germans at the Warsaw Ghetto. He administered the ghetto from May to July 1942 and played a leading role in the deportation of local Jews to extermination camps; he was known for his brutality. On October 29, 1942, Lejkin died as a result of the execution carried out by the Jewish Combat Organization.

Mieczyslaw Szmerling of the SP was the commandant of Umschlagplatz. He reported to SS Oberscharführer Mende. See Michal Grynberg, *Words to Outlive Us. Eyewitness Accounts from the Warsaw Ghetto*, NY: Picador.

In the square, there were two beasts raging: the German and the Jewish one, the executioner Szmeling. Next to the wire that divided the prisoners from the guards, there was a hydrant with a rubber hose. The crowd was pressing against the wire wanting to get some water while the Ukrainians were shooting randomly at the crowd wounding and killing as they pleased. The executioner Szmeling was more “merciful” because he directed the stream of water toward the crowd forcing it to back away.

The wounded and the dead were stuck together till the moment came to enter the cattle cars. At the Umschlagplatz the corruption was flourishing. People, feeling the taste of coming hell, were trying to bribe the guards with the last money and valuables they had so that they could release them as the members of their families. The demand was great, and the price for the release was getting higher and higher. In the evening, the news spread that the cattle cars pulled up. Suddenly there was a gunfire coming from everywhere, and the Ukrainians were pushing everyone from the back through the only exit in the barbed wire towards the train ramp.

The stream of people was directed to the gate of the former city archive of Warsaw where from the one side a large building stood and in front of it was the wooden swimming pool. In between these two structures, Hauptsturmführer Brandt stood erect. He was a short man, stocky, with a dull-witted face, and a whip in his hand. Brandt lead the final selection, and his trained eye was able to separate with no mistake a wife and a husband, a mother and her children, an old father and a son. Everything lasted splits of seconds. The whisk of the whip to the left meant (temporarily) life, that is, the release from the Umschlagplatz and return to the ghetto. The direction to the right meant being assigned to Dulag (Durchgangslager), that is a transit camp that was located in Leszno Street 112, in the Polish neighborhood. The direction straight meant “to the cattle cars.” Many times there were cases that a wife who was released did not want to leave her husband, but wanted to go with him to the cattle cars, but for such behavior the Germans had their “methods.”

Nearby stood a cordon of Ukrainians with machine guns and dogs. When someone did not walk in the right direction, the dog would grab the desperate person with its teeth and pull their flesh from the bone; the whoosh of the whip would accompany this strategy. Sometimes the anguished mothers would not let go of their children or the other way around because they didn’t want to be separated or just so they could say good-bye for the last time. But in this case, the whip, the dog, or as the last

resort, the bullet were much faster than the desperate attempts of the terrorized unfortunate ones. The guards of the Jewish Police were sneaking by alongside the throngs of people, moving slowly while being hit and sicced, and handled small children, or pushed rickshaws with older women or men, or carried babies to the cattle cars. Brandt felt a particular “weakness” for the Jewish children. It showed in that he liked to crash their heads on the wall.

Nevertheless, besides demoralized members of the Jewish Police and the sadistic Germans and Ukrainians, you could notice individual people who were dedicated to saving the Jews. One of them was a member of the Jewish Police, Arie Grzybowski from Lodz who, while risking his own life, was trying to save young people from the Umschlagplatz. Jozef Kaplan was like that, too.

Only very few people who belonged to the cleaning crew were lucky enough to get away from the Umschlagplatz. Some were able to get dressed in the uniforms of the Red Cross. In the houses in Stawki Street where till 1939 were the city archives, there was now the hospital of Czyste. During June and July, the Germans honored the doctors and hospital staff employed there as “Nutz-Juden.” The people destined for deportation were hiding in the cellars of that temporary hospital of Czyste. Some made their way to the roof trying to escape over the roofs back to the ghetto, but usually the Ukrainian bullets got them. Close to the evening when the transport was loaded, the Germans would direct a small group of selected people to Dulag. They were escorted by the Ukrainians, and still the smaller part of the happy ones to be let go would return to the ghetto only to get caught later and taken to be transported away.

This time, thanks to the help of Arie Grzybowski, I was able to escape the Umschlagplatz and return to the ghetto, but a few days later I found myself again at the Umschlagplatz. Together with Szymon Heller and Szymon Brauman I returned to the square where the whip and bludgeon talked. In the square where the adults cursed the day of their birth, and the children mourned their miserable childhood. In the square where every square centimeter of soil was soaked with the tears of Jewish mothers, the blood of the Jews, and the inhabitants of the Warsaw ghetto, it this square Arie Grzybowski appeared as if the angel of God. He entered the mouth of the lion putting his own life in jeopardy in order to snatch away the unfortunate lives from the German butchers’ clutches. In this hell on earth, where mothers often would leave their children to fend for themselves, and some



rescued their own lives at the cost of their brothers' lives, in this hell an illuminating figure of Arie Grzybowski appeared. He was standing guard – rescuing the Jews from the Umschlagplatz. But this time he was unable to free us. I was convinced I was seeing him for the last time.

Again, the well-known process of selection and loading people to the cattle cars was repeated.

During the selection, our group was directed to Dulag. In the evening when we were led there (it was a group of about 300 young people), Szymon Heller was able to escape near the crossing of Mila and Zamenhofa streets. When we tried to follow him, the Germans began to shoot at the columns; we were rushed to the exit at the corner of Leszno and Zelazna streets, where the SS men started a body search on everyone. In the evening we entered the barracks in Dulag at Leszno 112.

We stayed in Dulag eight days under the surveillance of the Jewish Police and the management of the camp comprised of the German Jews. The Germans came to Dulag to take away men and women to work. Two days before my arrival, there were 1600 people at Dulag, mostly youth taken by the organization “Todt” to work on fortifications of Smolensk. There were many cases of suicide in Dulag as well as deaths by heart attack. That was the outcome of applied terror. Dead bodies lay in the cellars for several days. The Germans buried the corpses when they started to decompose.

The Germans would gradually take people to different work sites near Wehrmacht or SS. Instinctively people were avoiding being selected for the deportation to the East. They were afraid of Smolensk or Witebska. Everyone adhered to the principle that since they were already in the hands of the Germans, they should remain in Warsaw or the county. Because of that there were many very upsetting and tragic scenes. The Germans came to take people in order to deport them to the East. The board in Dulag showed the number of people present at the moment that was actually higher than the number the Germans sought to take. I have to emphasize that the Dulag was a complex of huge five-story buildings (where the Konarski school used to be before the war). At the news of German arrival, people would hide in the cellars, at the attics, on the rooftops, and in any possible hideaways. When those people got caught by the functionaries of the Jewish Police, they were beaten. If they were caught by the Germans, they were tortured and often shot to death.

After many days of my stay at Dulag when I was at the morning assembly, Hauptsturmführer Nadolny (of Czech origin) together with the

engineer Jurink (German) arrived and chose out of 800 people 65 Jewish professional workers – locksmiths, mechanics, chauffeurs, technicians. These people were loaded on cars that took them through Warsaw to Bielany. I was included in this group together with some friends taken from the Umschlagplatz. We had no idea where we were being taken, and just in case we were planning to jump off the car if it were going beyond the borderline of Warsaw. In Zoliboz, the cars turned into Wloscianska Street and entered the property number 52. This used to be the City Communication Company till 1939, and later Oppel took over transferring the plant into a Rüstungskommando. We stayed there in barracks.

During the first day, Engineer Jurinek tried to create acceptable working conditions for us and promised that after working at Oppel we will regain the belief in humanity. We received high quality food and were guaranteed the pay rate for Polish workers. At Oppel we were able to relax after the constant stress in the ghetto, and at the same time we were confused with our own feelings towards the Germans. But this peace didn't last long. After a few days, Hauptsturmführer Nadolny returned from Lublin. As the first one, he ordered that all the Jews relinquish their money and valuables (apart from the clothing) and are allowed to keep only 100 zloty per person. We were not permitted to get in contact with Polish workers and get or read Polish or German newspapers. Each of us received two patches and was forced to attach them to the working uniform: one to the back and the other above the knees. The patches were yellow in the shape of the star of David. We were also informed that we answer directly to "Personalabteilung"<sup>95</sup> under Hauptsturmführer Nadolny, and that Engineer Golc – Polish – will be responsible for all the administrative and technical issues related to the Jewish workers. Since these new regulations were implemented, our situation has changed for the worse dramatically. We no longer were deluding ourselves. Hauptsturmführer Nadolny drove to the ghetto and brought four Jewish Police functionaries together with their wives who would serve as his tools. These were: Rotzajt, Rotbard, Domanowicz, Szyffer. The Oppel facility lasted till May 1, 1943. The daily routine was as follows: at 5:30 am after getting washed, cleaning of the barracks and self-made breakfast consisting of turnips, carrots, or beets, 100 grams bread, and black coffee. At quarter to seven we reported to work for the assembly overseen by the Jewish Police. At 6:55 am Hauptsturmführer Nadolny would

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<sup>95</sup> Human Resources Department

receive the report from the head of the Jewish Police about the number of the Jews working. Nobody was allowed to stay behind in the barracks without a note for the doctor. After the whistle announcing the beginning of the shift, all would go to their particular work station: carpentry, leather production, electro-technical, assembly, warehouse for spare parts. The Jews were excluded from any office work. We worked till 5 pm with a half-hour break for dinner. We ate in the barracks where the food for the Jews only was distributed.

Before Hauptsturmführer Nadolny took over the control, we had good quality food and enough of it, especially bread without restrictions. However now everything has changed, and we didn't get the allowance of sugar, fat, canned meat, and the bread came from a special baking batch marked with the letter "J" for "Jude" and contained a blend of sawdust. We received 200 grams of this bread a day. We realized quite fast that we won't be able to last long working hard on this diet. Everyone was trying to get in contact with some Polish people at work who at first were suspicious. As we worked together, their mistrust lessened, and what really united us was the hatred towards the Germans. I worked in a warehouse with six guys – Jewish. The Poles (the managers were Germans) worked in the offices attached to the warehouse. Among the Poles who were kind to the Jews, there was one that stood out, Stefan Miller, a member of KPP,<sup>96</sup> a captain of *Wojacy Polscy*<sup>97</sup> (commander of Żoliborz during the Warsaw uprising in 1944; now the chief executive for the leather industry in Łódź). Since he was an undercover agent, he was trying to find out Jews were at those barracks, and two of us, Engineer Szymon Fortajlow and I, were able to gain trust of captain Miller. He started bringing us Polish and German newspapers, and after some time illegal pamphlets of PPR appearing in Warsaw. We were helping each other now in that we, the Jews, gave the Poles our undamaged clothing and underwear, and they in turn gave us breakfast and more bread every day. By doing this we were risking being shot to death while the Poles risked being

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<sup>96</sup> The Communist Party of Poland (Komunistyczna Partia Polski) KPP was a communist party in Poland. It was a result of the fusion of Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania and the Polish Socialist Party-Lewica (Left).

<sup>97</sup>Partisans

sent to Auschwitz. We found out from the Poles (most of them were workers belonging to PPR, and out of 650, there were some from Endeka<sup>98</sup> and three were hostile to the Jews, including Engineer Golec) that the Jewish transports from the ghetto are sent to Treblinka, and supposedly all the Jews are being killed in gas chambers. We didn't believe these stories, but it was like a splinter in your heart driving us mad, and we started thinking about how to react if this indeed were true. Hauptsturmführer Nadoly noticed our anxiety and became more watchful. He would wake us up in the middle of the night for penalty drills like washing down the barracks with cold water on a frosty night.

A new order was given about collective responsibility, that is, in case that one Oppel worker escapes, the workers will be decimated. The Jewish Police received a confidential order of watching us during work, after work, and at night. Besides that, as we discovered later, Nadolny was able to talk a Polish worker into spying on us and inform him about the conversations and the atmosphere in the Jewish barracks. When the messages about Treblinka came more often, we invented at Oppel a system of small Jewish sabotage, which in the beginning meant committing small acts of sabotaging through destroying mechanical car parts, ruining working tools, slowing down the work. When the assembly of tanks started to be sent

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<sup>98</sup> National Democracy (Narodowa Demokracja) also known from its abbreviation ND as "Endecja" was a Polish political movement active from the second half of the 19th century under the foreign partitions of the country until the end of the Second Polish Republic. Created with the intention of promoting the fight for Poland's sovereignty against the repressive imperial regimes, the movement acquired its right-wing nationalist character following the return to independence. It ceased to exist after the Nazi-Soviet invasion of Poland of 1939. Party support was made up of the ethnically Polish intelligentsia, the urban lower middle class, some elements of the greater middle class, and its extensive youth movement.

to the frontline in Stalingrad, we, together with the Polish workers, destroyed all the precision parts. During nights, we would fill the cars parked outside with water instead of antifreeze, which caused them to rupture. Nadolny often warned the workers, Jewish and Polish, that those caught on a sabotage will be shot to death. The Jews were not allowed to leave the barracks without the escort of the Jewish Police. The Jewish restrooms were located in the main production hall and were now under surveillance. In the meantime, the Jewish Police wanting to show off their zeal and dedication to Nadolny but unable to catch anyone committing a sabotage denounced a friend Rapaport that he had foreign currency in his shoes. At midnight, Nadolny came, took away Rapaport's \$300, clobbered him and took him to the Umschlagplatz. Later we have decided to take revenge on the Jewish Police. When they were sleeping at night, four of our guys took away their bands, clubs, and hats. The same four guys, took care of their man, Rotzajt, standing guard at night, and took his band, club, and hat. The next day during the assembly, the Jewish Police was standing there without their uniforms, and Nadolny warned everyone that if the uniforms with the bands, clubs, and hats won't reappear, he'll send everyone to the Umschlagplatz. But the things were not found, and Nadolny didn't keep his word. After this incident, the Polish workers started liking us because they hated the Jewish Police the way we did, too. After 10 pm, Nadolny called all the Jewish workers together and because the stolen things were not found, he chose four workers to be incarcerated for 24-hours. He then would call these people in to investigate and to torture them, but three of them had really no idea who stole the things, and Taub, who knew, did not say anything. Nadolny finally gave up. There was one more investigation among the Jewish workers, but with no positive outcome for Nadolny. Szyffer asked Nadolny to go to the ghetto and bring new bands, clubs, and hats. All the workers lost privileges of Sunday furlough that was meant for deserving workers. We also needed to work additional hours regardless of whether it was day or night. When the trains with coal arrived, we needed to unload them.

## January 1943

And the time was passing by between the barracks and the factory till January 1943. On January 18, 1943 we heard some shots coming from the ghetto, and at night we saw the light of fires. The next day, captain Miller told us that the new action, called "Warschau Judenrein," has started at the

ghetto, and that the Jews resisted and took up the weapons. Some Jews told us about supposedly Jewish tanks participating in the fights. Everyone was fully supportive of the brother Jews fighting. Some Poles told us that they saw with their own eyes medical ambulances taking wounded Germans away. In the light of the new situation, we discussed with captain Miller to let us go and join a partisan group A.L.<sup>99</sup> (us meaning the sabotage group to which belonged Szymon Fortajn, Szymon Brawman, Zymy Taub, Leon Ajsler, Ganc, I, and one more whose name I don't remember. Out of all of us, I was the only one who survived). Szymon Fortajn, a member of PPR, completed his studies in France where he was a member of the French communist party as a student. The others were the members of Haszomer and other Zion organizations. Captain Miller promised that if only he hears something about an order to evacuate the Jews from Oppel, he will try to warn us and will give us the address to where to go. From there liaison will take us to the woods in the Lublin area. After three days, the fights in the ghetto stopped. There were no new orders at Oppel. The Poles claimed that the Germans were forced to interrupt the action because of the resistance of the well-organized Jewish fighting groups. Under these circumstances everyone wanted to leave Oppel and go back to the ghetto to fight there in the future.

At this point everyone had forged keys to the gates at Oppel and to the railway branch line leading to Oppel. Engineer Szymon Fortajl and Ganz managed to escape with the help of the forged keys, and that caused Nadolny to be furious with the Jewish Police. Then we and the Poles blackmailed the Jewish Police that if they terrorize and abuse us, they will be punished by the Polish underground, and so under this pressure they told Nadolny that they were unable to guard us without the help of Werkschutz<sup>100</sup> (factory guards). By saying this, they compromised their

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<sup>99</sup> The People's Army (Armia Ludowa, AL) was a communist partisan formed by the communist Polish Workers' Party (PPR) during World War II. Its goals were to fight against Nazi Germans in occupied Poland, support the Soviet military against the German forces, and to assist in the creation of a pro-Soviet Union communist government in Poland. It was one of the military resistance organizations that refused to join the structures of the Polish Underground State or its military arm, the Home Army.

<sup>100</sup> Inner security

position with Nadolny who sent them off to clean the premises of Oppel. Szyffer and Rotzajt figured out that we were preparing to escape from Oppel and offered us cooperation. We agreed under condition that we would get better food since Szyffer had the keys to the warehouse with provisions. At the same time, we had the Jewish Police under control. The provisions from the warehouse were now systematically stolen on every-day basis, vegetables, potatoes, and fat. We didn't take bread because it was counted. We were also busy with preparing hideouts on the premises of the factory in case of sudden action. During that time, there were countless air raids on Warsaw. Nadolny ordered that the Jews would train to become firemen to protect the factory. At night we were trained by Kalinowski or Kalinski from the fire department in Zoliboz, who was very friendly, but at first skeptical because he never trained Jews before. But after a few drills he was proud of us. To reward us after the drills, that took place after work, he would tell us all he knew about the situation at the front and about the work of the Polish underground. A few times he brought phosphorous bombs the English used on the Western front for us to see and instructed us half jokingly that if those fell here at Oppel, we should pour gasoline over them and run away.

The Jews who were employed at the Ostbahn<sup>101</sup> and delivered coal came to our factory. They told us (they lived at the ghetto but were allowed to leave for work in the morning and return in the evening) that the ghetto was arming itself. They instructed us to get into contact with the Poles in order to get weapons, ammunition, and grenades. The same gossip was spreading throughout the Jewish outpost of Wehrmacht in Wola<sup>102</sup> where I used to go to pick up polished pistons that the Jews produced. One day, captain Miller brought us conspiratorial edition of the new "Kurier Warszawski," a paper that appeared officially for purchase in Warsaw; in this edition there was a report about successes at Stalingrad. This paper gave us new hope and induced us to think that we should escape either to the partisans or to the ghetto to fight alongside the others. We could not plan a usual escape because the factory was heavily guarded by Wehrmacht since the events at Stalingrad. At this site, the vital parts for vehicles used in the war were kept and tanks were assembled. Captain Miller didn't want to send

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<sup>101</sup> East railway station

<sup>102</sup> Neighborhood in Warsaw

anyone to the partisans till the Germans were ready to deport the Jews from Oppel. He was reluctant because if he acted too early this could give away the conspirators who were still working at Oppel. We were an organized group of seven guys, and we wanted to take more—those whom we trusted—with us to the partisans.

For three weeks we didn't have any contact with captain Miller because he was being followed by Gestapo since there was a frame-up in his family. His sister lived in the district of Warsaw (now in the city of Warsaw, Helena Miller lives in Zoliborz, Krasinskiego 18) and was hiding two Jews. Besides that, there was a trap concerning one female liaison between A.L. and the resistance who was in contact with captain Miller. Since we really wanted to finally leave Oppel, we started using a different strategy. I, together with Ajsler and Taub, began to pretend to be sick. Dr. Majer, Polish factory doctor (rumor had it that he was a Jew; he had a Semitic look), who had a humane attitude and was friendly towards the Jews, noticed that we were trying to simulate illness, and without knowing the reason he gave us a four-day sick leave, which he then extended. Finally, in a confident conversation with us, he asked about our intentions. I told him I'd like to get a referral to the ghetto for a medical treatment and then I'll come back to work. I also told him that it means a world to me to see my family at the ghetto (I didn't have any family left at the ghetto). Dr. Majer spoke with Nadolny and informed him that after the illness I am fatigued, and I need better medical care. He suggested I should go back to the ghetto for a few days. Nadolny sought the advice of the manager of the warehouse where I worked and that of captain Miller. They determined that I perform my jobs diligently, thus, I should get a few days off.

## September 1943

On September 1943, after getting out of the ghetto for the first time, I met captain Miller who recounted subsequent stories of the Jewish workers at Oppel. When the Warsaw ghetto uprising began, and the battles were dragging on, Nadolny assured all the Jews that he was able to get a special permit for the Jews to stay at Oppel till the end of the war, quasi as "his own" Jews. Captain Miller checked for an ordinance regarding Jewish workers every day, and till May 1, 1943 there wasn't an order about deportation. His plan was to wait out the ghetto uprising and only when such order arrives,



send the Jews to the partisans. On May 1, 1943 till 2 pm no order arrived. After 2 pm all Polish workers left Oppel, and the Jewish workers went to their barracks for lunch. After lunch, engineer Golc told Jewish workers to clean up thoroughly their work site. The day before Nadolny left for Warsaw, he promised workers that they can work peacefully because nothing will happen to them. At 4 pm, the premises were surrounded by Wehrmacht soldiers and military police, and a few cars with armed soldiers entered. The Jews didn't get really scared because pretty often you could see Wehrmacht soldiers who came to pick up cars. Suddenly one of the officers yelled an order for the Jews to line up. Some of the Jewish workers managed to hide. Taub and Ajsler hid in the tubes where cars were repaired. Erenlib hid under some covers in the warehouse. The activists kept quiet in the earlier prepared hideouts. The officer asked engineer Golc about the headcount of the Jewish workers on May 1. He checked the list and found out that there were 8 workers missing. He then sent out some soldiers to look for them. When the soldiers returned without the missing workers, he was ready to leave with only those that were caught. But Golc didn't agree with this decision and asked the officer to wait while he went with his dogs to look for the workers. He found everyone apart from Erenlib. These workers were not permitted to take anything with them. After they were loaded on a truck and taken to the woods where the Wehrmacht soldiers searched them, took their watches away, and sent them to the Umschlagplatz and later to Majdanek.

Later during my visit in Germany in September 1946, I met Erenlib in Munich. He told me how he and Diamant were able to hide successfully under some tarpaulin covers, and there they sat out three days. During the night they would come out and try to leave the premises, but there were guards everywhere. During the weekend, no workers came so they had nobody to communicate with and to find out about the other workers or to ask for food. On Monday, May 3, one of the co-workers, Owczarski, came, and Erenlib asked him for food and help with escaping Oppel. Owczarski promised to bring them breakfast, but instead brought Nadolny and Golc. Golc was highly surprised that even though he looked for them thoroughly, they still were able to hide that well. On May 3, Nadolny took them in his car to the Umschlagplatz. On May 10, Erenlib and Diamant arrived in Majdanek where they saw all Jewish Oppel workers. Erenlib was assigned to the area 1 and in the area 3, he saw Taub who had the function of a liaison. After a 10-week stay in Majdanek, Erenlib was sent to Auschwitz. Before leaving he was a witness to a pogrom on 18,000 people. After a 5-day trip, he arrived in

Auschwitz where he worked in Jawiszewice in a coal mine. He was later evacuated to Germany and there liberated. Ehrenlib was born in Warsaw on January 1, 1921. He lived at Muranowska 1/22.

## April 1943

On Saturday, April 17, 1943 after work, I was escorted by the Jewish Police to the ghetto along with a few people. I was supposed to return to work after six days. Nadolny promised to release Taub and Ajsler after my return. Before leaving Oppel, captain Miller promised to take care of our group of Jews and Taub was supposed to be in touch with them.

At 3 pm we left the Oppel property and marched towards the ghetto. There were Poles approaching and warning us against entering the ghetto because in town there was a squadron of misplaced persons consisting of Ukrainians, Szaulis, Lithuanians, and young brigades that were stationed in barracks in Tarczynska Street 6 in the former factory of uniforms for the Polish army. We approached the entrance from the corner of Nalewka and Swietojska, where groups of workers returning to the ghetto after work were waiting for the security check. That day the inspection was really strict. The guards took away the saccharin and the bread from me. We walked over to the corner of Nalewki and Gesia. That part of the street seemed as if completely dead. There were pieces of feathers flying in the air, the stores were shattered, in the streets there was broken furniture and china, and all the courtyards were totally empty. The area was called a "wild territory," that is, nobody had the right to live there under the penalty of death. The former residents were deported during the July action. Immediately, I noticed the new wall going through the ghetto (which wasn't there before I left the ghetto). The wall stretched along Gesia Street and in the middle of the street beginning on Franciszkańska 22 till the corner of Zamenhof. This is where the gate was. As it was explained to me, this was the enclosure of the new central ghetto to which the following streets belonged: Bonifraterska, Muranowski Square, Zamenhofa, and all the streets going towards Okopowa. Besides that, there were small pockets of the Jews living in the old ghetto. These were shops.

I directed my steps towards the brush-maker community.<sup>103</sup> This area was also surrounded by an inside wall with the entrance gate at Walowa Street 6-8. This neighborhood housed approximately 12,000 people, and it was relatively quiet. I intended to remain in the ghetto. Nadolny wouldn't be able to find me. I wanted to get in touch with the Szmorowa Group about which I heard from the Polish workers at Oppel. This group took part in the January fights in the ghetto.

In the brush-maker neighborhood, I found out more details about Treblinka straight from the lips of the people who escaped, to be exact, from the former owner of "Madera" (located before in Twarda Street 5) and from Dejzor Szerszen. I also ran into Ganc, who told me that he was at the Hajmanowcy factory as he specialized in installing artillery pumps in the bunkers that the Jews were preparing in case the action were to start again. He also revealed that the ghetto had a new commodity of trade and smuggling, which were weapons and ammunition. In general, the Jews were in a better state of mind than when I had left. The life went on as usual. The broken families were trying to create new replacement families; people were getting married. There were numerous marriages among the young. There were many evening parties organized, including literary and art get-togethers with Szlengel.<sup>104</sup> The standard of living was at a high level in Jewish households, and people didn't deny themselves anything. Some of them were busy with thievery, others would sell their valuables, and the trafficking

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<sup>103</sup> Fights in the district of the brush-makers—German factory of brushes within the square of Swietojska, Walowa, Franciszkanska, and Bonifraterska streets.

<sup>104</sup> Wladyslaw Szlengel was a poet and a songwriter and produced texts for cabarets. He also wrote satiric poems for the press and stage. Szlengel used to be a ghetto policeman but resigned since he was unable to take part in the roundups of ghetto inhabitants conducted by the ghetto police during the deportations. He was the only Jewish writer who was still alive in the ghetto and became its chronicler. He is known to have been in a bunker during the Warsaw ghetto uprising, but the circumstances and the exact date of his death are unknown. Only part of his poetry and prose writings has been preserved, for instance, a collection of his writings in Polish was published under the title "Co Czytalem Umarlym" (What I Read to The Dead).

with the Aryan side was flourishing. In the brush-maker neighborhood, I saw some half-illegally established cafes, just like the one of Halberstadt, where you could buy everything. The ghetto was possessed by the madness of partying with alcohol. According to what I heard, there were about 45,000 Jews living in the ghetto that could be divided in two groups. Most of them were the youth who managed to hide by working in different shops and factories. The other group was mostly very rich people who were able to keep safe during various actions by paying for their safety. A small part of people could be described as social hyenas, who were able to survive because of their unprincipled lack of scruples. The Jewish Police reorganized under the command of Szmerling. They were not as many as before, and it seemed that they were silently boycotted by the Jews.

I stayed with Lutek Prywes where I found out that in two days there will be Passover. People were getting ready for it traditionally just as every year. At Lutek's apartment there were matzos, wine, and other needed items ready. His wife who lived in the Polish part of town on Aryan documents was coming over to celebrate. That day I also saw Sznefeld who came back from the Polish neighborhood. I found out that hundreds of people came from the Polish neighborhood for the Passover in the ghetto. I also met engineer Lew who escaped from the Polish neighborhood with his wife and child because some Poles denounced them. Before that they kept getting blackmailed and so they thought that sooner or later every Jew living there will end up in the hands of the Germans.

In the brush-maker neighborhood, the sprits were festive. People were content in general. You would hear all kinds of news about the politics by word of mouth. All believed that the day of liberation was near although some inhibited inquietude was felt, too. The news from the Polish neighborhood spread that the resettlers brigade was in town. Still the life in the brush-maker neighborhood went on. After work, people would dress up and go for a walk to the Spazierallee<sup>105</sup> which was Bonifraterska Street. You could hear the singing of the workers returning to the ghetto from the outside after work. People were busy thinking about preparing for the Passover. All day long I was looking for Szomry since the contact between us has been broken since the day I had been taken to the Umschlagplatz. Till the evening hours I was unable to find them. The next day I continued my search, this time in the area of Schulz and Toebbens. That very day, at the entrance

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<sup>105</sup> Promenade

to the house at Swietojska Street 38, I noticed an old poster that wasn't taken down informing the public about the execution of Lejka.

The next day everyone went about their business as usual (April 18). Before noon, I met up with Mosze Trinker who revealed that he was dealing in weapons and he himself was armed. He also said that almost all Jewish families had hideouts prepared in case of a new action, and some families, especially the young ones are buying weapons to protect themselves in the hideouts. The price of a pistol made in Radom was somewhere between 12,000 to 15,000 zloty (the price of one dollar in the ghetto was 160 zloty), bullets from 80 to 120 zloty for a bullet. Some people would sell their valuables or better clothing to get armed in order to be able to protect themselves in their hideouts and shelters. Moreover, all non-perishable food articles were in great demand because the shelters needed to be prepared for an emergency. It was expected that one could survive a few months in these shelters. All this preparedness had to do with the last great action of January 1943 so that people didn't want to be surprised unprepared again. Some shelters had attached tunnels that connected to the Polish neighborhood. All valuables were packed in suitcases or bundles and ready to be taken into shelters. Until noon that day it was quiet. I was supposed to go to Schulz and Toebbens because one could go from one shop to the other under the surveillance of Werkschutz. During the day you couldn't freely walk in the "wild zone" since it was made illegal by the Germans. At noontime the situation in the ghetto suddenly changed. The acquainted Aryan Poles were spreading phone messages that for April 19 grenade military units were mobilized. Those coming back from work from the outside were reporting about marching troops of Ukrainians, Lithuanian paramilitary, and cadets who were summoned and used during the action before. That day some people ran away to the Polish neighborhood. In the brush-making district prevailed chaos. Various conflicting messages arrived. Some of them were about the action of looking for weapons in the main ghetto; the others were about the order of immediate transfer of Schulz and Toebbens to Trawniki and Poniatow. In the evening hours, the guards were reinforced and nobody was allowed to leave the ghetto, but those who wanted to enter were permitted.

In the evening, I saw Jehudit Kutnowska of Haszomer who told me that some of our companions stayed in the Schulz district where she also lived. She used to see there Szymon Heller and Szlomo Winogrono. Because I didn't know anyone in the Schulz and Toebbens district, I decided to stay in

the brush-makers' neighborhood till Monday. On Monday I wanted to continue my search. If my search weren't successful, I wanted to go back to Oppel from where I would join partisans AL.

In the morning hours, groups of Zobowcy,<sup>106</sup> who got organized in July 1942 and merged with the brush-makers in August 1942, secured food provisions from the warehouses to which they broke in, that is, a few sacks with flour, sugar, fat marmalade, and bread. I personally didn't see them. During the first and second day of the uprising near Walowa Street 4-6 and

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<sup>106</sup> The Jewish Combat Organization (Żydowska Organizacja Bojowa, ŻOB) was a World War II resistance movement in occupied Poland, which was instrumental in orchestrating the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. The ŻOB was formed on 28 July 1942, six days after the German Nazis under SS General Jurgen Stroop began the Gross Aktion Warschau. A number of the left Zionist youth groups, such as Hashomer Hatzair and Dror, proposed the formation of a self-defense organization at a meeting of Warsaw Jewish leaders in March 1942; yet, the idea was rejected by the Jewish Labor Bund who thought that a fighting organization would fail without the help of the Polish resistance. Others felt there was no evidence of a threat of deportation. In addition, they insisted that armed resistance would provoke the Germans to retaliate against the whole Jewish community. In November 1942, ŻOB officially became part of and subordinated its activities to the High Command of the Armia Krajowa. In return the AK began supplying ŻOB with weapons and training. The Home Army (Armia Krajowa, AK) was the dominant and the largest Polish underground resistance movement in Poland occupied by Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union during World War II. The most widely known Home Army operation was the 1944 Warsaw Uprising. Because the Home Army was loyal to the Polish Government-in-Exile, the Soviet Union saw it as an obstacle to Communism in Poland.

Swietojska Street 38-36, I didn't see any Zobowcy, but I bumped into a group of hammers under the direction of family Kuzek (they were tinsmiths from Grzybowy Square) and into a group of carters under direction of Weinberg. Both of these groups were independent, not connected to Zobowcy. I also saw Heniek Lopata with a few armed people who were checking out the courtyards. The commandant of the Swietojska courtyard was engineer Slawek Mirski. When I asked him for permission to join a fighting group, he said he cannot and nobody will because I don't have a weapon; however, in a few days there will be a need to replace fighters so then he'll send me to some group. I received the same reply from Weinberg and Kuzek family.

Our shelter consisted of five restrooms on each side of a hallway, which was bricked up and matching the walls around it. The entrance to the shelter was masked with a "trolley," that is, a large piece of wall put on wheels and about 2 meters long. After everyone entered the shelter, this trolley was moved to cover the opening (length 70 cm and height 80 cm). From the inside, the opening was closed off with the heavy-duty bars. The little windows overlooking the street were masked with huge piles of garbage who were never removed on purpose. The first restroom was reserved for provisions that were rather scarce; the second was turned into a bedroom with cots; the third one was supposed to be a kitchen with a cauldron, light, and gas, and a few cots. The fourth bathroom was supposed to be for the elderly and also for those who were sick. The fifth bathroom was a water well, 6 meters deep, and the separated toilet. Around the walls were cots. This shelter that was meant for 40 people, on April 20 was holding over 120 people. At first it was difficult to say what kind of people were in the shelter. Later after many conversations, it turned out that most of them were people who had no money to pay for the construction of multi-family shelters and people who found themselves in this precinct accidentally. All other Jews living in this area hid in the previously prepared hideouts.

In the shelter I met Klojski and Liwazer, who had weapons for self-defense. Klojski (32 years old) spontaneously took over the leadership of the shelter. He ordered all the food supplies be stored in the main repository. On the first day each of us had his own food, but there was a rabbi who didn't want to eat anything but a sugar cube that was kosher for Passover. It was the second day of Passover. The rabbi, an older man, sat near the glimmering light of a small electric lamp and prayed ardently all the time. In the evening we heard the patter of feet above us and dry crackles, and it seemed theses

noises were like those from the action when they are looking for hiding Jews. After several hours of being in the shelter, there was no air left so we couldn't even light a match. The next day (April 21), the situation got worse. The children were crying terribly (several of them), and the mothers afraid that the cries can be heard outside and bring the Germans were wrapping them in pillows to suppress the noise. But this didn't help much since women started to faint. In the afternoon, the light went out. And in the dark, from minute to minute the anxiety increased, which caused the women to scream: "Open up, we don't want to suffocate." Young people took to crowbars in order to dig through the chimney to get some air in. But once they dug through, the fire erupted. The opening was then walled up with clay. Women were fainting, children crying, the youth was distributing water, but then we decided to leave the shelter. But to our horror after moving the trolley, we were unable to lift the entrance cover. We decided to cut out a hole in the wall that was connecting us to the other cellars. The work was going slowly because the men would faint while working. They were working in darkness because we couldn't light the candles. After roughly 1.5 hours, we finally had an opening in the wall (18 inches thick), and the young guy Szyja Szyjer was the first one to go through it. He yelled to us not to leave through there because the stairway that led to Swietojanska Street 38 was all burned. The accumulated smoke made it difficult to breathe and virtually impossible to get out to the courtyard this way. The flames and smoke entered the shelter and made almost everyone faint. Those few who were still conscious were walking around and pouring water on the ones that fainted. We covered the opening with comforters and pillows, and instead we were digging to get to the basement foundation, hoping that we'll get to the courtyard this way. But even this idea wasn't successful because the neighboring basements were full of smoke. After a few hours of hopeless work, we decided to pry open the cover to the trolley. A few men using the last of their strength were able to finally remove the cover, but there too, fire and smoke were spreading. Then the order was given to wet your clothes, wrap them around your head and hands, and make your way through the fire otherwise we would have burned to death inside the shelter. Some people panicked and were walking without the shoes; some women didn't cover their hair so they caught rapidly on fire. Only because the youth was still able to think quickly, everyone was able to leave the shelter and go out to the courtyard. But even here, we saw that the surrounding buildings were all on fire. Following our instincts, we threw ourselves toward the Swietojska gate 38 leading to the



wall dividing the brush-maker district from the Polish neighborhood. But here we found ourselves under gun fire from beyond the wall, and grenades were thrown at us by the Ukrainians so that some people were wounded. We ran back to the courtyard at Swietojska 38 and through the basements we got to Swietojska 36 where the front of the house was demolished in 1939. But here also we were suddenly under the gun fire coming from the garden of the Krasinski. We ran to the basements. We hid in the left part that was flooded with water from broken pipes. In those basements, we found people from the burned shelter of Mietek Rozenberg (the Jewish Gestapo, but so it seems not harmful) who had a great shelter and where the upper class was hiding. That shelter burned totally, and the 18-meter-long tunnel leading from it to the garden of the Krasinski couldn't be used because of the machine gun posts located in the house to which the tunnel led.

Around us, there was a sea of fire and smoke so that it felt as if I were inside a burning oven. The hissing of the burning houses got mixed with the sound of the moaning wounded and the lamentation of women. After our short stay in the cellars, the Ukrainians and Germans entered the courtyard and were met with a shower of bullets so that after they threw a few grenades, they gave up. Our cellars were full of smoke, and one of the grenades landed close to the Braun family (from Mietek's shelter), the owners of Olza company producing plywood. The wife told me later that the fire and detonation blinded them and covered them with lots of sand; however, the husband, who suffered from heart disease, died of a heart attack. A few days later the wife asked us to bury her husband in that cellar.

After the Germans had arrived, most people left for the Walowa Street 4, and I along with them. Here the group of Szymon Melon was fighting. At Walowa Street 2a, the wagon drivers were fighting against the Ukrainians who were trying to enter the courtyard. Many people in the basements would get hysterics attacks because they thought they would die in the fire or in the rubble of the falling apart houses. Many times, desperate people would go towards the wall in order to avoid being burned to death alive, but the bullets and grenades would kill them. The appearance of the people who stayed longer in the cellars changed from minute to minute, and they got a crazy glance in their bulging eyes. The women held their children tight while pulling their own hair out, and the men were helpless and awaited the nightfall.

In the evening Szymek Kac (of brush-makers), Heniek Zemsz (of hammer workers), and Fugman (of lathe workers) came to Swietojska

Street 36. Some of them took care of the people whose shelters got burned but saved themselves from the fire in the basements. The rescuers divided the saved ones and placed them into different shelters while braving the element of fire, another enemy. I ended up in Szymek Kac's shelter in Swietojska 36 in the cellars of the front house that was almost completely destroyed in 1939. There I met Festinger from whom I found out that his group of about twenty people escaped from the shelter in Swietojska 38. They rushed to escape towards Walowa Street 2 in an attempt to break through to the "wild territory," but the strong German guard forced them to pull back, and some of them got wounded and killed. The rest of the group hid in the bathroom in Walowa Street 2, but the Ukrainians chasing after them entered the courtyard and started throwing grenades into the staircases of the building and into the bathroom. Those from the group who had weapons were shooting back. They were able to fight off the Ukrainians so that till the evening the Ukrainians didn't return to the courtyard.

However, Liwazer (from the shelter in Swietojska 38) said that his family was hiding upstairs, and he covered up and camouflaged their hiding place while he himself went to the shelter in Swietojska 38. When he got out and saw the raging fire, he immediately thought about his family upstairs. His despair and anguish were indescribable. When he entered the building, the whole staircase was already devoured by the fire. Nobody answered to his calls. The thunder of shots, crackle of the burning houses, and the falling-down parts of the burning door frames or roofs, and the hellish swelter of the great fire forced him to flee. He hid in the basement and was close to become insane when he realized what the fate of his family was. In the evening we learned that his family noticed the flames beginning to enter the shelter. There wasn't a minute to waste. They escaped the shelter through the burning hallway. His brother jumped from the second floor, but the parents attempted to use the staircase that lead to a precipice since the part of the staircase had collapsed. They ended up in a basement full of smoke, but luckily there was a small window through which some air was coming in, and the water was trickling from the broken pipes thus shielding them from the raging fire. They were hurt, but with the help of some people they walked to Swietojska 36. They met their son and brother there. They were assigned to a different shelter and hid there with Mietek. Unfortunately, the brother of Mietek Liwazer fell so miserably that he was unable to move. When the Ukrainians came, they gave him a

Gdanedschoss<sup>107</sup> (people saw it and later told the story), and the fire ended his ordeal.

In the bunker of Szymon Kac, I heard a story about a mine that exploded next to the entrance of the brush-makers district and killed the SS-men about to enter the district and to carry out the action.

Wladyslaw Szlengiel (Polish-Jewish poet) continued to create poems praising the defenders of the ghetto and describing the heroism of the soldiers without any weapons who were the Jews in the bunkers. Nobody was able to get rid of this tragic reality that the torching of the whole brush-maker district. No one believed the bestiality of the Germans would reach these proportions, that in the middle of Warsaw the Germans would set on fire the entire Jewish neighborhood in order to incinerate the inhabitants. The reality was too terrible to even believe it. Only the children when hearing about all the houses burning were asking their parents naively: "Where are we going to live now?" The shelter was treated by the children as a temporary place to stay and hide during the day when the Germans came to get the parents, but for the night everyone routinely went back to their homes to sleep. In that shelter there were many people who had Aryan documents, and some who had apartments in the Aryan part of town. Szymek Kac himself had a place ready in Owock where his brother signed the Volksliste and got a job at Ostbahn as a railwayman.

All those people were desperately trying to get into contact with the people from the Aryan district to get help (they had money and jewelry). All communication with the Polish district was broken off since the first day of the uprising. At the shelter of Szymek Kac there was a secret telephone cable with a phone so that one could call those living in the Polish district, but the people at the shelter didn't allow anyone to use it in fear that this would lead the Germans to the shelter. That is how the idea emerged of digging a tunnel to the garden of the Krasinskis on the other side (the length of the tunnel was 18 meters). One counted on the possibility of getting through, thanks to having the weapons and by killing the policemen standing guard on the Polish side.

But this time, our fate was not friendly. The earth was very loose, and there wasn't any suitable material to make the walls of the tunnel firm so that the walls were collapsing. It was also very difficult to lift up the sand and mask it. There were heaps of sand piled up in the freshly made caves of the

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<sup>107</sup> Shot of mercy

tunnel that needed to be taken out. Lifting up and getting rid of the sand was done with the chain of hands working together which was extremely difficult because of the small area. At that time there were 160 people in the shelter. During the day, the sand that was dug out would be stockpiled along the walls; during the night it needed to be taken out and hidden under the piles of bricks lying around. Because the dry walls would collapse all the time, our work needed to be stopped. There was a radio at the bunker, but we didn't get any optimistic news. The food products stored at the shelter were about 4000 kilos, including flour, sugar, fat, noodles, biscuits, and more. These items were kept in specially prepared containers hermetically sealed so as not to spoil. The air in this shelter was also better since the shelter was equipped in a ventilation system (designed for 60-70 people).

When all attempts to get to the Polish side failed, the owners of the shelter decided to find a different place for those whom they recently accepted from other burned-down shelters. It turned out that the shelter for the poor in Swietojska Street 38 (where I was before) didn't get destroyed totally.

## April 24 1943

On Saturday, April 24, all young men were given tools and two bricklayers were assigned to them, the brothers Blusztajn, and this crew had a task of expanding the shelter at Swietojska 38 and preparing it for a larger number of fire escapees. To this shelter, we added three basement restrooms that were masking the entrance with the help of the rubble remaining from the partially burnt staircases. We made holes in the ceilings of those restrooms so as to lead the Germans astray into thinking that these basements were abandoned. The old inhabitants returned to this shelter, and the new arrivals were fire escapees from destroyed buildings. Among them was a rabbi who told us how during the day he would hide in a garbage container, and during the night he would walk around and get fed with some matzos from the people from the surrounding shelters. The family of engineer Lew came to our shelter; before they were hiding in the shelter at Walowa Street 2. They got out when the vault caved in and the fire was spreading. That shelter had only one exit, and everyone hiding there was trying to get out first. The fire was spreading fast so that all wood cots were burning, and the real fight began among those several dozen people who desperately wanted to leave

through the one opening. No more than a dozen people were able to escape. In the meantime, the burning vault of the staircase collapsed totally, and the rest of people were trapped and died in terrible torments. To our shelter several injured people were brought: asphyxiated engineer Tajst, the burned young boy Monk, the wounded older lame woman Jakubowska, and the burned daughter of engineer Lew. For them a small isolation ward was set up.

That evening, Mundek from the carter shelter (brother-in-law of Wajnberg—the leader of the carters) came to us and told us about a terrible tragedy that took place in their bunker. The wife of Weinberg gave birth. Their bunker was in the “wild territory” at Nalweki 14 where the Germans pass by often. The co-inhabitants of the bunker were afraid that the cries of the baby will give them away, and together with a doctor who also lived in the bunker they decided to poison the baby. The mother of the baby was seized with fits of hysterics, and the people needed to isolate her and cover her mouth so that she wouldn’t scream. Mundek said that the “wild zone” is not being set on fire. At that time, we had 100 people in our shelter, and from the vaults afire the heat was beaming so that the men wore just boxers, the women had only bras and panties on, and the children were lying all naked; from all their bodies the streams of sweat were flowing. Dr. Krukowski advised that in order to keep healthy everyone needs to drink about two hundred grams of salt every day.

In the meantime, the Germans started using small cannons that shot at the brush-maker district day and night. We knew that we couldn’t leave the shelter before establishing a contact with the Polish neighborhood so we tried to make it more livable for ourselves. When houses burned, the electricity was cut off, but we didn’t give up on light. At Swietojska 36 in the front there was an electric transformer. We attached to it a hastily cobbled together cable that we concealed and brought through the cellars to the shelter. It took us a lot of work to conceal the cable so that the Germans wouldn’t know from where to where it leads. Our shelter was also in danger of being flooded because the water was pouring down from the pipes in all cellars. Heniek Zemsz together with others make a wrench with which they were able to turn off the main city pipe at night so that the water pressure went down. We moved away the pipes that went straight to our cellar into a different direction because we couldn’t stop the pouring water completely. In the front cellars of Swietojska Street 38, there was a large quantity of potatoes belonging to the warehouse with the victuals of the brush-makers.

We transported those potatoes to our shelter and thus secured provisions for us for a longer time. At nighttime we would leave the shelter to look for contact with other shelters. At Swietojska Street 34 in the third courtyard was Wajsbort's shelter. They wouldn't let anyone into that shelter. Only later I found out that when the fires broke out, the Zobowcy (Zydowska Organizacja Bojowa) was hiding in that shelter.

On Monday, April 26 a group of a few hundred brush-makers, who were hiding in the flooded cellars of Franciszkanska because their shelters were burned down, was taken away. It was said that some of them were still fighting and shooting. The others thought it was better to go with the Germans to be sent to Trawniki or Poniatowa, rather than die of hunger in the flooded cellars. I think it was the first bigger group that was taken away from the brush-maker district.

I found out about the battle that took place at Swietojska 26. We went there at night in order to get into contact with the smugglers who were hiding there. We believed that they had plans of the sewage tunnels or that they know the way through those tunnels to the Aryan district. In the courtyard we saw several corpses of young people lying around. The local people told us that these youth were resisting and fighting and fell during this battle. Among the dead I saw the body of Jozek Skowron who was in our shelter during the first day of the uprising. We also noticed that the guards at the corner of Nalewki and Swietojska installed a reflector that lit up the whole Nalewki Street. In our shelter, the first unexpected incident happened that proved to be detrimental in our circumstances. Gaunt engineer Tajst who was poisoned by carbon monoxide died at the shelter. The corpse lay all day with other people at the isolation ward. At night, it turned out that it was impossible to get it out through the shelter opening. The shelter had only one exit with the opening of approximately 1.5 meters (covered with a hatch) from which a 3-meter tunnel was leading to the main exit. This complicated gateway was difficult to deal with for healthy people. It was more difficult to get luggage through it and even more difficult to move a corpse. When after several attempts, we failed to drag it out, the doctors recommended we cut off the lower limbs. However, under the circumstances it proved to be impossible to do that. The night was very short, but at 5 am we needed to start the day, and the corpse was still there for one more day. The effects of the corpse being there for two days were even detrimental because of the lack of air the corpse was oozing a smell that was spreading throughout the shelter and causing women and children to faint. After a debate during the

day, we attempted to dig out a hole in the wall that had been cemented in and this way to get rid of the corpse. The funeral procession consisted of five people with the rabbi leading. In the shimmering glow of the candle, they carried the body to a different cellar where they buried it. The rabbi prayed kadish over his grave so that he received heaven's grace since it was given to him to die natural death and be buried in a Jewish ceremony. But the gravedigger job wasn't finished yet. In that same cellar that engineer Tajst was buried, we found a decomposing body of Szymek Szyjer and some unknown man. we buried those corpses in the cellars of Swietojerska 38. At that time there were many corpses in the entrance halls of different houses, in the courtyards, in the streets, but we didn't touch these corpses or move them because the Germans coming to do the action in the morning would have noticed that change.

Starting on April 27, we decided in our shelter that every day one of the young guys would go outside as a watchman to observe the system of the action carried out by the Germans. In the evening the watchman returned and said that he didn't see anything worth noting close to us. But he found it a little bit disturbing that there was an old woman in the neighboring courtyard and was lifelessly staring at the stairway. At the dusk, the woman went over to a handcart where she slept. She repeated some spells and names. At that time people were suffering from some persecution complex so that every Jew who was unknown was suspected to be at the service of the Germans or shady. It was decided to bring the woman to the shelter, but she protested and desperately refused since she wanted to stay in the courtyard. Dr. Krukowski diagnosed that the woman lost her mind because of a nervous shock. The shelter inhabitants who recognized the woman and heard the names she vocalized knew that she was calling her children that burned alive in the hideout made in the apartment on the third floor. She couldn't get to them when the fire broke out. The woman stood there for a couple of days or at night she slept in the cart. One night from the first to the second day of May, when we came out of the shelter we saw her body right next to a puddle of thickened blood, which was a blatant prove that the Germans visited the courtyard.

At the shelter, the life was "normalized." All day long, everyone stayed in their cots or on the floor without any possibility to move. The shelter was so stuffed with people that if someone needed to use the restroom, the whole undertaking required dozens of people to move causing turmoil and noise. People's nerves were strained to the highest pitch, and

just a murmur created fits of hysteria. The leadership had to order everybody not to move at all for a day, not even to take care of the physiological need. We lead the “life” at night. That “life” manifested itself in preparing a bit of nourishment for all the dwellers of the shelter as each would receive one meal a day. The food supplies in the warehouse were getting scarce and were conserved for the children. Another manifestation of that “life” was that we took the children out into the courtyard to just get some fresh air. Often, we would need to bring them back fast because of the bangs of guns and the flashes of missiles stunned and blinded the children who then wanted to go back inside where it was silent. Many people in the shelter were too afraid to leave it even at night for a bit and get some fresh air. People were permitted to go outside by taking turns, and each person had 15 minutes. The youth worked all night by securing the shelter and bringing firewood (which needed to be done with caution so that the Germans wouldn’t notice any changes around the house letting them know that there were still people inside it). The youth went out also to get in contact with other people.

Our shelter had one major flaw, that is, there was only one exit. At night we were digging under the foundation of the cellar making a tunnel leading to Swietojeńska 38. We needed to add one more cellar restroom to our shelter. That restroom was located under the gate to the other courtyard. On the first day, there were many volunteers who wanted to live in that new restroom. But after spending some time there, almost everyone gave up on the idea because it was a nerve-wracking experience. Almost all day long, you could hear over your head the sound of steel-toed boots of the Ukrainians, the voices of the Germans, shots, screams, or the cries of the caught victims. Only the youth and armed people occupied that restroom. The isolation ward turned out to be burdensome and harmful to all shelter inhabitants. Moniek’s arms and legs that sustained major burns were oozing large amounts of pus, and his wounds were rotting and giving off a stench that spread all over the shelter. Wounded Jakubowska was moaning in pain and when reprimanded, answered that she’s keeping it quiet so nobody can hear her. The worst, however, was that two doctors diagnosed these patients as hopeless cases because they didn’t have an adequate care and medication. Moreover, there was a danger of the children getting contaminated. When the state of the patients became truly hopeless, and they were writhing with pain, the doctors said that they had just a few hours to live. There was no possible power to convince them not to scream in pain,



and we were afraid that their screams were endangering over 100 people in the shelter. Then the doctors recommended poisoning them. The first strong dose was administered to old Jakubowska, but to the doctors' great surprise, after a few hours her health improved, the pain went away, the sick woman calmed down, and she even got better appetite. Then the rabbi declared that there must be the hand of God in this, and the sick should be left to their own fate.

On April 28, we found out from the mouth of Pierocki that the shelter of small Leonek at Walowa 2, was found out by the Germans. In that shelter there were several dozen people. That makeshift shelter had only one exit, and the cries of children gave it away. In that shelter there were three guns. Supposedly those people didn't let anyone use them in fear of getting shot dead. Those people were still deluding themselves thinking that being taken to the Umschlagplatz and the camps in the Lublin area could prolong their lives and at the same time help them survive to the day of liberation. The whole thing started with the Germans drilling an opening in the ceiling of one of the bathrooms belonging to the shelter. From the inside the warm air blew, which was a sign that some people must live there. Nobody stirred when they heard: "Alle Juden raus!"<sup>108</sup> Then the Germans blew up the ceiling with dynamite, and the Ukrainians took everyone to the courtyard. Pierocki hid himself under one of the cots and covered himself with the sand. Because the Ukrainians were rushing, they didn't notice him. After the search, those people were taken to the Umschlagplatz. Pierocki left his hiding place and came to us to let us know that we should go over to that shelter to take the provisions left there untouched. This was our first szaber,<sup>109</sup> and the situation with provisions improved immensely, but now the silence was more stringently observed.

That evening, Klojnski proposed that we go to Walowa 6 to the shelter of the bakers in order to establish contact with them because his family was in their shelter. In the courtyard of Walowa 6, nobody was able to give us any information. Our intuition told us that there must have been a tragedy at that shelter. We found a hatch that was covered with the rubble and looked inside the passage leading to the shelter, but it was filled with the rubble. After some digging, we found charred remains, which explained to us

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<sup>108</sup> All the Jews out!

<sup>109</sup> Theft

the silence of the bakers. All those hiding in that shelter were burned alive. The shelter turned into a mass grave of its inhabitants. At night you could still see the glow of the fires from the “wild territory.” At the shelter there was a talk about those fires as supposedly caused by the Poles on purpose because they want to come to our rescue, and there are only hours before the walls of the ghetto dividing us from the Polish neighborhood will be attacked. People regained faith, and the hope lit up the faces of the gloomy “cave-dwellers.” All kinds of plans were made, which way and where to escape. Some even presumed boldly that the cars will drive up to take us away. Others claimed that the influence of the Polish side will help since there was a promise that once the ghetto uprising starts, the Polish side will join in, and together we will free ourselves from the German occupation.

But these illusions disappeared in an instant. We found out that the “wild territory” was also being torched by the Germans. The gloom and apathy took hold of the shelter inhabitants anew. Physical and moral exhaustion influenced negatively the mental state of everyone. People were foretelling the worst future from the horoscopes. They claimed that in the best case scenario after a long struggle with death, we will succumb just like the bakers. Again, on the agenda appeared the idea of getting out to the Polish side. Some left the shelter alone in order to get to the central ghetto through the shelters where their acquaintances stayed and where the tunnels were leading to the Polish side. While we, the youth, together with Klojnski and Heniek Zamsz decided to open up the manhole in Walowa Street and try out the sewage tunnel and check out to where it was leading. Taking all precautions, we got into the sewage. Since we didn’t have the blueprint of the sewage system, we tied one end of a long rope to us while the other was left with the friends out in the street. Wading in the canal, we arrived at the stretch that was completely walled up and from where some earth gases were leaking out. There was no other way. In despair and resigned, we left the canal, deciding to take up the search in other canals tomorrow.

On May 2, we went to Muranowski Square to get into contact with people from the central ghetto, and I found out about a tragedy that happened there. When the Germans failed to win over the area in-between Naleski, Gesia, Zamenhof, and Mila, they set fire to it with the flamethrowers, and around the area they assembled machine guns not letting anyone escape alive. The tragedy in the central ghetto was greater because most houses were old and thus wooden construction would burn faster so they looked like houses made out of cards that fall apart and caved

in burying everyone in the shelters – basements. In our area when the houses burned, there were at least the burned skeletons of houses left with the skeletons of apartments, floors, ceilings, but not so in the central ghetto.

At the Muranowski Square, we saw a piling-up hill of rubble where previously modern houses were standing. From underneath that rubble, it were as if the unvoiced complaint of the fallen insurgents came. During the first, second, and third day of the uprising, there was a battle over each floor, each room, and each inch of the staircase of these houses. The Germans were formally fighting to get flags fluttering on the top of the roof. The revisionist group of Pawel was fighting here heroically.<sup>110</sup> That night we found out that the group was able to get out from the ghetto and into the Polish neighborhood, but nobody was able to show us the route they used.

At that time, those Jews who had their shelters and bunkers in the “wild zone” were in a tragic situation. They were totally cut off from any Jewish resistance and from any Jewish “islands” which were the brush-makers district and the central ghetto. There were attempts to get into contact with them; however, it was impossible because the area in-between, the “wild zone”, was staffed with the camouflaged machine guns.

From day to day, the situation was getting worse and almost hopeless. Again, we started thinking about the tunnel leading from the shelter of Szymek Kac to the garden of the Krasinski family.

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<sup>110</sup> Jewish Military Union (Żydowski Związek Wojskowy ŻZW) was an underground resistance organization operating during World War II in the area of the Warsaw Ghetto that fought during the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising and 1944 Warsaw Uprising. It was formed primarily of former officers of the Polish Army in late 1939, shortly after the beginning of the German occupation of Poland. During the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising ŻZW is said to have had about 400 well-armed fighters grouped in 11 units. See David Wdowiński, *And We Are Not Saved*, New York: Philosophical Library, 1963.

## May 1943

On May 5<sup>th</sup> we sent off a group of young guys to Szymek Kac's shelter to help with the construction. I was also in that group. We worked on the tunnel every night starting at 9 pm till 5 am. During the day we rested. In the night of May 7<sup>th</sup>/8<sup>th</sup> we were only separated from the garden by the distance of 2.5 meters. We were hoping that during the following night we would be done digging through. On the seventh day, the Germans were walking over our shelter, and the whole brush-maker district was completely monitored by German guards. We were afraid that they would find us. But that day, they searched only the area of Szymek Kac's shelter. They caught those in Starowiejski shelter in the dead-end courtyard. The name of the shelter comes from the man who was a very good tinsmith and a professional roofer and who built the shelter out of iron siding. Starowiejski shelter was designed for three families, 20 people in total. But on that day over thirty people were in that shelter that got caught because the whole family of Mietek was assigned there together with Mietek. The Germans blew up the entrance-trolley (almost every shelter had an entrance like this), but they were afraid to enter. When nobody answered their calls, they threw tear gas inside and won this way. Starowiejski's son, Abram (23-25 years old), was very good with weapons and wounded one of the Germans; this way he was able to escape and come to our shelter. Abram told us that his family together with the Rozenbergs tore up all the money they had and threw away the valuables so that the Germans wouldn't get their hands on them. Mietek Rozenberg identified himself using his Gestapo ID, but this time it didn't help, and he, together with his family and the Starowiejskis, was taken to the Umschlagplatz. Abram Starowiejski reported that he noticed a Jew assisting the Germans who, he thought, was an informer (traitor). After the tragedy at the shelter of Szymek Kac (described in my diary), those rescued stayed inside the burned-out rooms of the scorched building at Walowa 4.

At night on May 9, it turned out that the family of Szymek Kac was able to escape together with the brothers Blusztajn to the shelter of Zemsza through the so-called rat canal, that measured 50 cm by 60 cm and connected both shelters located under the rubble. We were able to rescue both families and transfer them to our new hideout that we called a "joint."

At our new place, we met Klojnski, Liwazer, and Festinger who had left the shelter at Swietojska 38 because they couldn't stay there any

longer as they expected it to be found out soon. They were observing the whole action at the shelter of Kac and concluded that from among those people taken away by the Germans some members of Kozko family were missing (this was a large family; four sons and daughters, etc.). In the night we started looking for them, but in the whole shelter there was no sign of them. However, we found Trynkier (old tinsmith from Rynkowa Street 4) who fainted because of his wounds. He reported after being revived that he was in the tunnel with the others, but the tunnel was caving in burying everyone, and now those people who got stuck in there are going to suffocate. All night long we were working on the tunnel trying to get through, but unfortunately it was damaged so that there was no possible way of getting through to those people; the whole operation would have required taking out a few carriages of sand and rubble into the open. Under these circumstances we were unable to carry out the task during one night. We were trying to go about it systematically every night and hide the rubble. But this was Sisyphean work because the Germans appeared again and blew up all the basement bathrooms of that shelter so that there no longer was access to it.

In our joint we feel human again. Normally nobody will be bragging about breathing clean air because it is something obvious, but we—after many weeks of suffocating in the damp, stuffed, dark dumps without enough fresh air—delighted now in fresh air and sun that now almost blinded us. But slowly we got used to the sun again, only our eyes were still red and purulent. It felt strange to lie down to sleep in burned rooms. At night it seemed almost as if we were in a normal house, and everything what we went through was only a nightmare.

But there is no peace in the metropolis. Only a light of a rocket or noisy wind that blew through the openings in the broken walls and tore down the pieces of plaster that fell on us were enough to remind us about our reality. The day was worse because we were not used to the regular noises of life. Every word coming from the garden of Krasinski of stamping shoes of the guards along the wall or – this happened a lot – marching troops of the murderers through the courtyard could lead to a fit of hysteria because of already high anxiety. All day long we had conflicting emotions. Till now we have seen and heard a lot. On the one hand, we felt happy to be still alive, but on the other hand it was enough to look out the burned-out window and see Walowa Street 4 in order to have enough of this life.

In the courtyard, a few corpses of women and children lay. The bodies were swollen to an abnormal size, and the sun, cats, and crows were finishing them up. That day, a hearse came to the courtyard and took away the corpses, and my friends recognized the driver who was Mojsze from the cemetery division of the Jewish community in Warsaw. After the monotony of the shelter, now we had a diversity of the views that were moving like in a kaleidoscope. In the afternoon, a wagon, accompanied by the SS men and Poles, arrived. The morale of those Poles was so low that they came here to rob. On the ground floor of that building there were mechanical and lathe workshops. The house burned down, but the machines were still there and had their value. For three days, those human hyenas were plundering the building. I was thinking about how human degeneration was advancing so that instead of bringing flowers to the cemetery, one now steals. Inside the burned-out walls, we didn't have peace either. On the vaults, lay corpses, baby carriages, skates, and toys. From the ceiling, burned chandeliers hung, and in buried kitchens white tiles shined. Some hooks were still left over the oven where the half-way burned pots were hanging. In some ovens, we found hidden things, but we couldn't find any living owners of those apartments.

From afar you could hear music playing, young people yelling, boys shouting to sell "Kurier Warszawski."<sup>111</sup> Just a few meters away from us there was the lively Polish neighborhood. It was as if all the screams coming from there were piercing our brains and suggesting strange associations about stages of life and death. Our life now was similar to the one at Walowa Street 4; partially burned out, petrified, without the external expression, but having firm foundation. And we firmly believed that the Jewish people in their foundation were unmoved, but according to the statistics there were 3 million who died.

As I already said, in the new joint I met Klojnski, Iwazer, and Festinger. They reported that in the third courtyard at Swietojerska 36 on the third floor of the burned house, there was a militant group of Szmul Mellon. Klojnski and Iwazer had weapons. Sitting without doing anything and waiting for death to come was not what we wanted, that's why we contacted Szmul Mellon's group, that is Klojnski, Iwazer, Festinger, Felek Rozenberg, Janowski, and I did that.

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<sup>111</sup> Daily newspaper

Combat fights in the central ghetto and in the district of workshops were going on till the day of the fires. Later I established that part of the Jewish fighters retreated and transferred to the Polish side. However, the rest of the fighters and those who were protecting shelters or individual people with weapons adopted partisan tactics. Under these changed circumstances, we chose self-defense tactics. We made some adjustments in the buildings by making new openings and installing line ladders thus connecting the buildings. Hence we were connected in the form of a rectangle. This way we were able to protect a couple of houses at the same time with the relatively small amount of ammunition. Up high we were able to swing ourselves from one house to the other making it look as if the fighting groups were big. These saved houses became soon a haven for those Jews who still survived. Since April 1942, large armed troops prowled through our district. The remaining ghetto fighters were now partisans. In Mellon's group I met Kuba who broke through from the central ghetto after the fights had stopped. Ari Lebesold and Mosze Halbersztadt were there too. From them I got the information that Jewish fighters used the sewers to get to the Polish district, and they had to wait a long time in the canals because there was nobody who could pick them up on the Polish side. Some people came back to the ghetto because they could no longer wait like this. Among them was Jakub Krawiec from Mila who spent two days in Mellon's group and returned to Mylna Street to try to escape through there.

Mellon also told us about a fight that his group was involved in on May 4 in Swietojska 34. When the Germans discovered them, they were in the second courtyard in the staircase area of the burned house. The Germans attempted to get to them several times, but the shots fired on target forced them to give up. The Germans threw grenades into the stairway and broke off the landings. Mellon's group couldn't escape their joint. Only at night were they able to dig some holes in the walls and get to the third courtyard where the current joint is. When we showed up, there were only young people there, 18 of them. Most likely they were not linked to the Jewish fighters. Mellon told us that he had visited the shelter of his parents at Walowa Street 10 yesterday (Mellon organized his own group which we joined). Till 1943 there was a garbage dumpsite there. In this shelter it is totally quiet. Those living here are optimistic and believe that they will be able to survive a long time. Mellon tried to contact several times the red-headed Jozek, the security guard at the house at Swietojska 19 (he was a Polish smuggler to the ghetto), but till now without results.

With the new companions we feel much better, and the awareness of a futile death was replaced with the awareness of the death in the battle. On May 13 at night we heard air raid sirens, and at midnight lights in the sky came into sight, like brightly shining chandeliers, all over Warsaw, and especially as it appeared to us, over the ghetto. We ran out of the joint thinking the Russian paratroopers were about to land to save the ghetto. Holding our breath, we were waiting for descending parachutes with weapons, ammunition, and food. But we were not terribly disappointed when instead of help a hail of bombs fell on the sleeping Warsaw. We were convinced that this was a backlash from the Soviets for the unpunished murder being carried out on the Jewish population. The air strike had its bright side because we immediately thought how we should now try to break through the wall surrounding the ghetto and get to the Aryan side.

When we arrived at the wall at Bonifraterska Street, it turned out that the German guards were there unmoved, and so we wouldn't be able to break through without using more force, thus, we couldn't escape. When we started observing the guards on the Aryan side, a shower of bullets went into our direction so that we finally needed to give up. We were returning via Walowa Street 6 deluding ourselves that because of the heavy bombardment the Aryan side will attack the German guards. But back at the courtyard the reality dimmed all our dreams. That day the shelter of "White Lew"<sup>112</sup> (a baker; this shelter was called the shelter of Krygier and "White Lew" because it was most likely one of the bakers' shelter) was found out. That shelter was located in the rectangle in-between Walowa 6 and Swietojska 30. There I noticed a crater, measuring 5 meters, from which swirls of fire and smoke were coming. Near the shelter several corpses were lying around. These were mostly young men. These men were resisting, and some of them were caught with the weapons in their hands (these were the occupants of Krygier and White Lew shelters). The Germans took the others to the Umschlagplatz and set the shelter on fire. From this burning shelter, we rescued a few sacks of crackers and a box of tea (later we smoked this tea instead of cigarettes). We also succeeded in getting several Jewish and Polish books from there (I remember among them was Hofmokl Ostrowski's<sup>113</sup> book) that we later read in our joint. At dawn, when back at the joint we were anew seized with

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<sup>112</sup> "Lew" in Polish means "lion."

<sup>113</sup> Polish lawyer arrested by Gestapo.



desperation that our escape wasn't successful again and that our metaphorical Jewish chain became smaller by one link.

No changes happened in our situation even in the next days. The problem with getting to the Aryan side was persistent. Only that "other side" was to protect us for a while from the danger. Our desperate efforts to get out concentrated again on the tunnel of the former Mietek Rozenberg's bunker. The burned engineer Kramsztyk was its architect and knew the tunnel very well. He also made the plans for us of how to connect to this tunnel from Walowa 2. In the cellars of Walowa 2, there was a multitude of flies that were swarming down on the corpses lying around. When we entered, it seemed as if the cellars were filled with the ghosts, and the heat coming from the ceilings made it appear as if we were already in hell while alive. In order to get into the tunnel, we had to dig through and move away a lot of sand, and finally we were able to dig under the cellar foundation at Walowa 2, which bordered on the house in Swietojska 38. During our digging, in the cellars of Walowa 2 we bumped into a large amount of porcelain buried there as well as some glass products used for production of chandeliers and window panes.

Having entered the tunnel, we found inside 18 blocks of butter and sugar. The tunnel, just like the other ones, was not dug through to the exit. We started to work frantically, but this work was very dangerous because we were at this point located under the Aryan district on the border of the Krasinski's garden. Over our heads we heard the sounds of the guards' boots that steadily were measuring their guarding stripe, and each hit with the spade created an echo which the guards would hear without a doubt and could put an end to our plan with just one grenade. That is why we were carrying on with the job very slowly taking all the precautions. We didn't dispose of and hide the sand anymore because we figured the Germans wouldn't enter the cellar that glows with heat and gives off a stench of decomposing bodies. Every night after finishing the work we masked the entrance to the tunnel. We left some secret signs for us to know whether the Germans were controlling this area.

After two days of strenuous work, we reached the foundation of the building at Swietojska 25 or 27. Getting into the house itself could have been done in two different ways. Firstly: dig under the foundation of that building further or the second way: scoop out some bricks in the foundation (smashing them out was impossible because the German guards were too close). We decided to dig our way under the foundation. After we had

reached our goal, getting a really narrow burrow, then suddenly an unforeseen incident put all our work to waste.

The cellars next to Swietojska 25 or 27 were flooded, and the water got across through our pit and was flooding our tunnel. We needed to backfill the dig and wait for the water level to fall. But the following day, the Germans discovered that tunnel and blew it up. The only benefit from our work was getting the butter that we were able to swap for other products from people whose shelters were not yet busted or those living in the skeletons of the burned-out buildings.

Most people were at Swietojska 34 and Walowa 6 as well as Swietojska 30. At Swietojska 34, we found our rabbi who succeeded in escaping from the group of people (those taken away from the shelter at Swietojska 38) being lead to the Umschlagplatz. Rabbi told us that he lived in a burned-out house and prayed Tehillim<sup>114</sup> for all the Jews living still in the ghetto. We gave him the butter and other food items and decided to support him with our food as long as we remained here.

On May 25, the workmen of waterworks escorted by the Germans came and turned off all water mains carrying water to the brush-makers district. But from this hopeless situation, we were saved by Heniek Zemsz, who took a group of people to help, made a makeshift master wrench, and opened one water main that allowed water flow to the second courtyard of Swietojska 38. Regardless of that, we didn't have the water for too long. The Germans managed with the help of the Polish waterworks workers to cut off the water completely from this area. We started getting water from the remaining artesian wells located in the bunkers that had not yet been discovered. But getting water this way was extremely difficult since even carrying a pail of water from the shelter was complicated because of the labyrinth of passageways in the tunnels. In this area, there were also ordinary wells. One of them was in the shelter already discovered by the Germans at Swietojska 28. That shelter was located in the cellars under the bathroom of that house. The entrance to that shelter lead through the toilet bowl (which was in a regular restroom stall) and was fastened to the wall with the masked hinges. When the toilet bowl was removed, you could get to the

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<sup>114</sup> "Tehillim k'neged tillim," "Psalms to fight the bombs"

<https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/the-book-of-psalms/>

opening and climb down the ladder to the cellar. For a few days we were getting the water from there, but one day when we came, the water was colored. The people staying close by warned us against taking this water because the Germans were doing something there and most likely poisoned it.

After disconnecting water service to the brush-makers district, the Germans started using a new system during the action, that is, after uncovering a shelter with water wells or springs, they would poison the water. If they found any artesian wells, they would blow them up. They would also seize all food items and suitcases with clothing from the uncovered shelters and take these with them or destroy them right there. Frequently they would pour kerosene over the food and leave it there. The action was carried out with the help of fire, dynamite, wiretap, and sometimes dogs. Because the action was dragging on, the Germans were coming up with new satanic ideas. It was more difficult to track down the remaining shelters and capture people alive. In order to be successful, the Germans turned to set-ups and tricks. The squads that came out to the ghetto would bring with them Poles and one Jewish informer. The Jewish snitch would go around to different courtyards and call out (in Yiddish) different names or yell (also in Yiddish) "Jews, come out, it's the end of the war." Poles played the role of a lure and acted as if they came to get into contact with the Jews in order to help them. But because we were able to observe and hear everything from the inside of our burned-out houses, we heard the commands of the Germans and saw that those people were escorted by the Germans – it wasn't that we ourselves didn't fall for this scheme, but we also warned others living around. The Germans were mad since they couldn't catch anyone from this area. They started then to blow up systematically all the tar sidewalks in the courtyards and all ceilings in the cellars to which they had access. Some of buildings in Warsaw had cellars under the sidewalks in the courtyards so this was done as a precaution.

One night we had an only incident (during my whole stay at the ghetto during the uprising) when one of the hiding people used weapons to get money. Returning with the water, we heard cries coming from the courtyard of Swietojska 36. When we arrived there, it turned out that some young boy (unknown in this area) attacked with his gun Miss Kanal (as we found out later) in order to rob her. Miss Kanal was the sister of Izrael Kanal, one of the Jewish fighters. She was able to escape from the shelter of Weisbrot after being found out (Miss Kanal was the granddaughter of rabbi

Kanal in Warsaw). She was hiding alone for a couple of days. We gave in to her pleas and took her in to our group. She told us that in the shelter of Wajsbrot a large archive was buried, and supposedly there was also a lot of ammunition. That shelter was blown up. Through the huge craters, we climbed inside, but we couldn't find the ammunition she mentioned. However, after the liberation in March 1945, when I was in that shelter I was able, in the presence of dr. Frydman and dr. Wasser, to determine that the archive was dug out by someone, and some of the materials were scattered around and covered with piles of sand. The materials were deposited with the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw.

We took precautions against informers in that we decided that everyone we meet at night must show their ID and return to the place where they hide. However, for those from our area we had a different passwords every night.

On June 1<sup>st</sup>, two young people came to our area who told us about a tragedy they took place in their shelter located in the "wild zone" in Gesia Street (near Okopowa). This is where the shelter of the gatherers of rags and feathers was, "Nuss" shop. In that shelter, people survived for five weeks under pretty good conditions. Their house was set on fire in the beginning of May. They saved themselves by running away to a different house, and after the fires died down they returned to their shelter. At the end of May, they were found out by a German patrol. The shelter dwellers chose to fight (that shelter was armed well). Several people died fighting, and the rest was shot dead on the spot by the Germans. They were lucky enough to break through the surrounding them Germans at night by crawling along the building of the prison in Gesia Street, the so-called Gesiowka (it is a former Jewish prison that was transformed into a branch of Pawiak). In our area, our acquaintances took care of them by taking them to the shelter of the shoemaker (I don't remember his name).

That night, Heniek Zemsz with his family, Szymek Kac with his family, the brothers Blusztajn, and the siblings Lewinson left our area and moved to a different joint in the "wild territory." They thought that staying in the brush-makers district makes no longer sense because the Germans knew it too well.

June 1943

On June 5<sup>th</sup> during the night, we heard from Pik's fighter group located on Muranowski Square (it appears that it was an underground group that fought bravely) that they were found out by the Germans and fought a battle with them in which many people from the group died. Those who lived joined the group of Mojsche Bolshevik (I don't know who he was) at Bonifraterska 11-13. They also told us that there is a Pole with them, a plumber, who came from the Polish neighborhood and wants to lead the Jewish people out of the ghetto for 5, 000.000 zlotych/\$120.000 per head.

After a consultation, we decided to send three people from our group with the intention to get into contact with the underground in the Polish neighborhood so that they could help us to get out and join the partisans. We sent: Mellon, Lolek, Lebensold and his brother. Szmul Mellon had an established contact with the Poles. We collected the required sum of money. They took their weapons and ammunition. We walked them to the canal at the crossing of Gesia and Smocza streets, and we arranged for them to return to us in three days. That night a group of several people left, including two guys from Mojsze's group, three from our group, the dentist, Miss Kobryner, and some people I didn't know.

On June 6<sup>th</sup> Leon Grynbaum joined our group. For several days he had been hiding all alone at Nalewki 27 (that house bordered on Zamenhofa 24). His family with other families had their shelter in the front cellars. They used their former stores as their hiding place in what was the "wild territory." They thought this zone won't be controlled as much since no Jews lived there. Living or being there was strictly forbidden under the punishment of death since the day of the uprising. Nevertheless, those people were putting their lives in danger while building the shelter, moving their things over there, not only food but also cots, artesian pump, and other things needed when living in isolation there. Besides the Grynbauns in the whole forbidden area there were a few merchant families. At the end of May, a squad started snooping around their shelter, but the Germans were not sure if someone still lived there because all people ran away through the tunnel of the cellars of Nalewki 29 – Gesia 1. Till the evening their shelter was not found out (that is, the Germans didn't use the dynamite to destroy it). Those people thought that the Germans had no idea about the shelter in that house. At night the Jews returned to the shelter. Next morning the Germans blocked all the exits of the shelter and threw some unknown gas inside. All those hiding inside started choking and came outside. Because the sister of Leon Grynberg became unconscious, Leon together with his brother-in-law

pulled her into a different cellar bathroom and decided to stay there until they get pulled out. After a few hours, they heard the Germans leaving together with the caught Jews. Leon even heard the cries of his mother. The brother together with the brother-in-law decided to save the sister. At night they got through to the cellar of Zamehof 24 where they had been hiding for some time. The sister's condition improved. That night Leon's brother-in-law went to seek help at the shelter of the doctors from the hospital Czyste since he wanted to leave the sister there. However, he didn't return that night. He still didn't return the next night, and he hadn't been heard from since. At night Leon left the cellar to go to the shelter to bring crackers as he was trying to keep his sister alive. When she was left alone, the rats attacked her. The sick sister was trying very hard to stay alive and was throwing dirt at the rats. Yet she was bitten badly. Her life was quite short (24 years) since she died in that cellar. At night we went with Leon to bury the body of his sister.

Our new joint had its good sides (In my diary I already mentioned that on July 3<sup>rd</sup> we moved to Nalewki 27 to the third courtyard on the third floor). In the front was the shelter of Grynbaum, which was fully stocked with food, undergarments, clothing, and bedding. In that house there was still running water and an artesian pump. From that shelter we took some provisions along with the bedding, and from time to time we used the undergarments. In the shelter there was also old money – zloty – from before 1939; apparently the owners of the money didn't want to exchange it for the new currency since some Jews thought that when the war is over, this money will equal dollars in its worth. There were also many books there that we took for us to read. Leon determined that the Germans never entered the shelter from the day they found it and never returned to it. That is why we thought it safe to go back there to get more things without worrying about leaving any traces for the Germans to see. We were just careful about leaving any traces outside that would give away the fact that there were alive people roaming around in that area. We wrapped our shoes in the soft covers made out of the comforters. The most difficult task was crossing all the courtyards at night, entering the street, and getting back from the street to the joint. Our already sick imagination was difficult to calm down as we thought the Germans remembered everything, and even the slightest change can alert them and lead them to us. Those courtyards during our stay there looked indeed like on the first day when the fires died down.

All day long we lay around on our cots. Only the lookouts on the far away posts carefully surveilled the area. Vis-à-vis us was the bombed Jewish hospital, where some tangled beds were hanging from the burned-out holes (mentioned in the diary) in the rooms, and the Jewish part of Gesia Street (mentioned in the diary) was covered in heaps of debris from the bombed house. Around us was just dead silence, interrupted every morning by marching search squads heading to the central ghetto or to the brush-makers district. Often, we saw groups of the condemned being marched to the Umschlagplatz. All around, as the eye could see, there were hundreds of sticking out chimneys, the silhouettes of former houses, and mounds of rubble. From time to time, the sounds of gunshots came to us.

In the third courtyard of that house in its cellars there was a manufacture of club soda, a storage of pins, bags with paint as well as all kinds of lockers and ditches where people hid during the July action. At Nalewka Street 23-25 (one property) in the fourth courtyard, the structures to the right and those across weren't burned down. In these apartments the storage units for furniture Werterfassung (part of the Jewish furniture seized from the apartments during the July action was there) were located. We made a hole in the wall to connect to that house. From the storage we took chairs and a table in an attempt to give our existence some kind of normality. Once during the looting in those storages, Salek Wislicki had an unpleasant surprise. To his disbelief, out of the blue some Poles appeared, escorted by the Germans, who came to pick up the furniture. Salek managed to hide in one of the wardrobes, and after the robbers left (the Poles were afraid to come alone), he came back to our joint and recommended we brick up the opening leading to the courtyard of Nalewki 23-25; nevertheless, we didn't brick it up but camouflaged it.

In our current joint (Nalewki 27) the fire didn't devour everything because the rooms were totally empty. Part of the house is fully burned; but in the place where we are, only the doors, some of the floors, stairs, and some pieces of the roof are burned. Some walls are charred and cracked, but then others remained untouched and preserved their freshness. In one of the rooms, the whole window frame with the window pane was saved; the other buildings around this courtyard were burned completely with their cellars. In the attic, there were many corpses and flies. Next to the bodies, the bags with crackers and bottles with water were scattered. We couldn't at all establish who those people were that got killed. In the attic we saw the

traces of steel-toed boots from which we concluded that the Ukrainians killed these Jews.

In this joint, we are resting at the moment by reading books, playing cards, or discussing different subjects. Someone not privy to this scenario could have an impression that we are people hiding from the plague. On the outside nothing suggests that the destiny of these people has been already decided, and that we are only postponing the day of death. A keen onlooker would notice anxious gazes, nervous gestures, and from the faces he could read the desperation of the situation. The men aged terribly, and with their unshaved faces appeared as cavemen. If you were to look deeper into those people, you would discover that each of them was carrying a great burden of experiences that would yield a few volumes of books.

For example, Klojnski: a man around 37, a lawyer. In July action, he belonged to the Jewish Police and was actively participating in the first days of action. But he was forced to change his conduct because the fate wanted that his own family ended up as the other Jewish families in the ghetto. They took away his parents in August 1942, and he lost his wife along with his only child in September. For that reason, he sold the last valuable things he possessed and bought himself a gun. The only goal in his life was to revenge his parents, wife, and child. He appeared to be assertive with a firm voice that doesn't like objections, but at the same time calm and collegial. His face is usually gloomy, and he is always lost in thoughts. Every few days he takes out the picture of his wife and the child and shows them to us, and tells us the story of how his colleagues, while he was on duty, took them away to the Umschlagplatz. This man appeared as if he never was able to calm down; his guilty conscience poisoned even his vegetative lifestyle now; he felt guilty that he took part in the action, and that he wasn't home when they came to get his family. Sometimes I get the impression that he is totally resigned. Yet, Szmull Mellon was a different type. I think his whole education consisted of 7 grades of primary school. He comes from a family involved in the fur industry. He is about 22, well-built, full of energy and life. He belonged to a progressive youth group. He bought a gun for his own hard-earned money and brought it to the ghetto. He also coordinated his friends so that they



could buy weapons for the fight. He was impressed with the spirit of fighting that ZOB<sup>115</sup> created.

His first fight was with his parents who didn't want to let him out of the shelter where they were hiding. They couldn't at all reconcile with the thought that their son could die in the fight outside, while he could be hiding in the shelter. But his fervor for the fight won over. He is full of hope that we will escape the "crate of death," and we will still be able to throw a punch to the enemy while fighting alongside the Polish partisans (I write in my diary about Mellon's death). A very interesting guy is Lejzor Szerszon about 35-36 (presently he is Mellon's substitute after his disappearance). Szerszen was taken away from the ghetto during a roundup during Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur in 1942. He ended up in Treblinka and was assigned to work at a clothing warehouse for a few weeks. Then he was sent to dispose of the corpses. His work consisted of opening the doors to the gas chambers and taking care of them when the bodies of the gassed Jews spilled onto the ramp. He, along with the other Jews, ran with these bodies to the mass graves. Szerszen came from a Hassidic middle-class family. His parents had a warehouse with iron articles in Warsaw county. He himself was an agent delivering iron goods to different factories. A deep loyalty to his country was instilled in him. He was exceptionally religious, believing and practicing Jew that valued the Jewish tradition and culture. He wasn't able to speak Polish well. Till the July action he was employed in the Nuss factory and his part-time job was delivering various goods to other factories. During the action, he went to the Umschlagplatz together with his family. In Treblinka he underwent a moral transformation; he still was a believer, but the spirit of fighting was winning over. He is an especially wise man of keen mind and noble character. In his spare time, he talks in whispers about Treblinka and his escape from there. His tone, while recounting his stories, is filled with bitterness for the Jews who didn't want to believe him when he was back from Treblinka and told them about that hell. Indeed, his stories are more than gruesome. Our minds certainly would not have believed this if we hadn't seen similar or identical scenes with our own eyes. His stories usually focus on a German from Treblinka named Dolfi and on gas chambers. He told us how oftentimes in the gas chambers there were corpses of people who

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<sup>115</sup> Żydowska Organizacja Bojowa (ŻOB), Jewish Combat Organisation (Yid. Yidishe Kamf Organizacye) was an underground organization established in Warsaw.

were gassed multiple times therefore their bodies swelled to outlandish sizes. This happened because the Germans, being in a hurry, let the people into the gas chambers even though several uncollected dead bodies were lying scattered around. (The gas chambers – narrow spaces, where people were standing close to each other so that when the doors opened, their bodies would spill out. A few workers would enter the chamber and pull out the bodies that were still inside; through the other door the new victims were let in). The tragedy escalated because the Jewish workers assigned to carry the dead bodies didn't want to deal with those huge swollen-up ones, and because they didn't work fast enough so they got whipped.

Szerszen was also telling us about the screams coming from the gas chambers, about the executions of the workers, who were so tired that sometimes they would fall into the mass graves together with the dead, about daily selection and executions of Treblinka workers/prisoners. When Szerszen was telling his stories, the listeners' faces became filled with revenge and resentment. Szerszen always ends his stories with a warning that we shouldn't let ourselves be taken alive by the Germans. I think that he is the most brave and combative of all of us in the group. Everyone listens eagerly to his advice because his words are pregnant with important insight. Szerszen's personality influenced us in that we didn't want to be taken alive (He got out of Treblinka in one of the cattle cars transporting clothing to German warehouses).

LOLEK LEBENSOLD (around 19-20 years old) attended preparatory high school for four years. He came from a progressive middle-class family and entered Haszomer in 1940 and gdudu Tel-Amal in Warsaw. He lived through both the July and January actions with his parents. He worked with his brother at Ostbahn and supported his parents. He was influenced by the Szmor movement, but didn't belong to ZOB<sup>116</sup> because he couldn't leave his parents to fend for themselves. He was one of those who gave a cue to others at Ostbahn to get armed. Together with Mellon, Szmer gathered dedicated peers and was getting them ready for the final fight. He is brave, honest, friendly, and very much dedicated to the group. In secret he dreams about getting out of the city of dead and joining the partisans (I wrote about his death and heroic actions in my diary).

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<sup>116</sup> Żydowska Organizacja Bojowa (ŻOB), Jewish Combat Organisation (Yid. Yidishe Kamf Organizacye) was an underground organization established in Warsaw.

FELEK ROZENBERG – 27 years old, comes from a brown-collar family and has secondary education. In the ghetto, he worked in the galvanizing shop, in the brush-makers shop, and in the tool-making shop in Walowa 4. He was constantly in a bad financial situation so that he couldn't buy any weapons. After the loss of his wife, the only goal for him was to fight (From the burning house he saved the telephone. The details are in the diary). He had high mental acuity, was devoted, and was able to get along with others. He's leaning to the left politically.

JANEK JANOWSKI – about 37-38 years old, from a middle-class family, secondary education, a mediocre guy, with an average mind, a great egoist; dedicated with his body and soul to business. He is driven to become wealthy (for instance, while we were looking for weapons, he was searching for valuables and jewelry in the shelters), unfriendly and off-putting in interacting with people.

LEON GRYNBAUM – 25 years old, secondary education, comes from a rich merchant family in Nalewki. Before the uprising he was dealing in arms. He armed himself and his parents' shelter. A very friendly man, honest, and a dedicated comrade, and self-aware Jew. He was standing out from his family because of his leftist convictions. He was a keen observer and a good advisor and knew the "wild territory" as well as the whole ghetto very well.

WISLICKI SALEK – around 32 years old. He came from a well-known family of industrialists Wislnicki from Lodz. He was homeschooled on the secondary education level. He was an intelligent man, but a great coward and came to our group through a coincidence. He is dedicated to the group because he believes that with the group he will manage to get to the Polish district where he has a secure apartment arranged with friends and to where he sent all his valuables including clothing, jewelry, and money.

MOSZE HALBERSZTADT – 19 years old. He comes from a lower middle-class family of merchants. He just had elementary schooling and was basically an autodidact. Since 1941 he has belonged to Haszomer in Warsaw. Till the July action, he worked in a locksmith's shop and later at Ostbahn. He was courageous, bright, very friendly and thus liked in the group. In various discussions you could detect his inborn intelligence. I think that after the July action he became very sentimental. It appeared sometimes that this sentimentalism was bordering on melancholy. Even in our circumstances in spare time he devoured books. His only goal was to get to the partisans.

LIWAZER MIETEK – comes from a rich Chassidic family of button manufacturers in Warsaw in Pruta Street. He was brought up according to

Hassidic tradition. But already in his youth he freed himself from the influence of his family and became progressive. He was very friendly, not too smart, and still had those middle-class traits from his family. He gladly agreed with the ideas of others, was eager to do different projects, but he wasn't adamant in carrying them out.

FESTINGER – 21 year old. I cannot imagine him differently but always with a smile on his cheerful benevolent face and with his typically Jewish sad eyes. He was a man of average height, dark complexion, and black hair. He was from a family of merchants and had secondary education. I suppose he was raised in the spirit of assimilation, but he loved his people and the Jewish tradition, and enjoyed Jewish humor. Festinger was a righteous, honest, and dedicated friend.

PEPI KANAL came from a Hassidic family. She was 24-25 years old. She went through a professional training for paramedics at Czyste hospital. Her nature was cheerful, good, and empathic. Experiences left an imprint on her hence she grew melancholic. Incessantly, she was mourning the death of her husband who used to be a doctor at Czyste hospital and whom she married in the ghetto. The whole group valued and liked her. She possessed one of the most beautiful human virtues – it was a belief in and love for human beings.

When I recall HENIEK ZEMSZ (32-33 years old), I can't help but wonder about this old saying, "what eyes see, the hands do." He was an exceptionally talented man with truly proverbial golden hands. He was able to construct various machines on his own in his shop at Grzybowski Square 10 (at the brush-makers district in Walowa 4). He came from a family of craftsmen and merchants and made some serious money on his own. He was a man with a heart of gold, very resourceful, able to get oriented very fast, with his inherent Jewish wittiness. Till 1942, he was a model husband and father (later his attitude towards his wife changed). Towards people in general, he was very understanding and direct. In the group he was a sincere, good, and loyal companion. His extraordinary resourcefulness saved us many times. In our group, Heniek Zemsz was the most fierce and brave fighter.

BROTHERS BLUSZTAJN – (Aron 20 years old, Berenk 22 years old) came from a family of craftsmen, they attended cheder<sup>117</sup> and were

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<sup>117</sup> A school for Jewish children in which Hebrew and religious knowledge were taught.

autodidacts as far as secular education is concerned. They were good and valued skilled workers, and in the ghetto where they built shelters, they proved themselves to be trusted bricklayers. In the group, they were considered sociable because they didn't have complicated characters. Brothers Blusztajn were a sort of adjutants to Heniek Zemsza. They were hard working and dedicated with their whole souls to Zemsza. It seems to me that is why they learned so much from him.

CZARNOCZAPKA (25 years old) came from the region of Plock. His parents had a farm. He attended cheder and completed a few grades of primary school. He was a hard-working straightforward man. You could tell that he grew up on a farm. Eagerly he listened to and followed orders. On his own, he didn't like to think, that is, he talked first before thinking. Sometimes, you could see some egoistic traits in him, because his healthy organism demanded more food, and he couldn't control it.

LOLEK LEWINSON was an interesting guy; his family had a tile company. His upbringing at home was meticulous, and he graduated from a preparatory high school. In 1939, he participated in fights against the Germans. After his internment as a prisoner of war, he got released in Spring 1940. In the district of brush-makers he belonged to the factory security service. Generally, he was liked because of how sincerely he treated people. In the group, he didn't stand out, but he wasn't a burden either. His experience in fighting was sometimes useful.

TRINKER MONIEK was a son of a roofer from Rynkowa 3-5. He was raised in Jewish spirit. After being done with the primary school, he was trained professionally. He was a brave and bright observer and a good companion. He perished when only 20 years old (mentioned in the diary).

It is difficult to speak about the rest of the group and form my opinion about them including the description of their characters because some of them didn't play any special role in what we were doing, and the others faded away from my memory. But I have to admit that the larger portion of the group was of patriotic spirit and came from middle-class or tradesman-proletarian families. Those people were brought up progressively and truly cherished the spirit of advancement and democracy. I suppose it is of importance to note that most of the companions from the group were from Warsaw, the children who grew up in the Jewish streets of Warsaw. Those objective circumstances influenced the formation of their character and viewpoints.

After the incident with Lolek (described in the diary) we needed to leave this area and go back for a few days to the brush-maker district again. In that district, nothing changed much. Paramilitary units came as always to demolish the tracked-down shelters. From time to time, they were able to take away a few Jews. However, they were unable to stumble upon a few shelters, not even after careful demolishing of many cellar ceilings that were on top of those houses and those under the courtyards.

Those people still hiding in the shelters were losing their weight and were systematically becoming savage so that after approximately six weeks in those shelters-graves, they resembled skeletons rather than living beings. Typical for them was that their moves, while walking in the courtyards, were unsteady. Every little noise, or a louder voice scared them, and their nerves were worn-out till the point of breaking down. Those people couldn't understand how is it possible to live in burned-out houses and look at what the Germans were doing. Almost all shelter inhabitants suffered with conjunctivitis, and a new illness systematically attacked them, which, to my mind, was the palsy of extremities.

More often now, the Polish workers from electric, phone, gas, and water companies came to this district. The workers were always escorted by the Germans, but they worked unsupervised. I suppose, at that time the total technical blockade of the ghetto began. The Germans were trying, with the help of the Polish workers, to completely isolate the remaining Jews by cutting off the water, electricity, and gas supply and stop the illicit phone connections. This way they sought to destroy all possible ways of survival. This strategy was also meant to break the will of the last Jewish fighters, armed partisans, and the soldiers without weapons hiding still in the shelters. In order to isolate the Jews from the Polish district, walls inside the canals were put up. Inside the ghetto, all the canal entrances were blown up and blocked off with all kinds of rubbish, bricks, and rubble so that nobody from the ghetto side would be able to get inside the canal. I guess the Germans had the exact plans of where the shelters were located because now when they had more time, they went back to those locations to destroy the provisions left there. As far as the technical blockade is concerned, the Germans succeeded only in cutting off the water completely, but till the last day of my stay in the ghetto they failed to cut off the electricity and gas. According to the professionals from our group, the electricity couldn't be completely turned off because the transformers that were in the cellars of

the burned-down houses delivered the electricity to the houses from the opposite street already in the Polish district.

On July 8, we noticed for the first time (since the first day of the uprising), the Poles looking through shelters for food and that without being escorted by the Germans. At first, we thought that the Germans were done with the action, and backed down; but only one glance at the wall sufficed to see that the guards were still there on their posts. The Poles gathered all things that were left lying around in the courtyards, and searched carefully the cellars and shelters, taking away anything they could find and that had value on “the other side” for the living people. Carrying heavy sacks with spoils, they returned to the other side through a passage leading to the Aryan district only known to them.

When those people returned to these parts the next day (4-5 people) we decided to stop one of them. But they didn’t come to our courtyard. However, they came to the courtyard in Walowa 2 where there was a group hiding together with Lutek Prywes and his wife, engineer Kramaszytk, engineer Moszkowicz, and others.

Engineer Kramaszytk was terribly burned, and his non-healing oozing pus wounds caused him terrible pain. The pain was so strong, but this man was fully aware that he was in the open area where every murmur could attract the attention of a search squad so that it took all his willpower not to moan aloud; he was forced to just moan and weep silently. This man became the proverbial ball and chain. He was lovingly taken care of by his wife and found the devotion of his friends. Engineer Moszkowicz, without even thinking, surprised two Poles that he found in the cellar of the building. At the sight of the phantom with a gun in his hand (because this is how he looked), the Poles screamed, “Jesus Mary!” and kneeled in front of him begging him not to kill them because they had wives and children. After he was able to tell them that his intentions towards them were not malicious, he explained that all he needed was to get some news “from the outside” and some medications. These people then, looking at him with uneasiness, informed him that since three days “better guards” had been standing along the walls of the ghetto, who took a bribe from them and allowed them to jump over the wall so that they could get something from the shelter for themselves. Those guards, however, told them that if they found a live Jewish child in their sack or if they were taking back a Jew with them, they all would be shot. The Poles were very shocked to see that in those burned-out houses there were still people who were alive and normal and able to speak.

The Poles rather believed that they were facing a terrible ghost. While talking to him they were constantly crossing themselves and repeating, “we beg you, don’t kill us.”

Engineer Moszkowicz arranged with them that he would prepare a lot of good-quality clothing in exchange for the needed medication and some bread. They left the requested things at the arranged location, taking instead the “promised” clothing. They also left a note saying that they would be back in a few days and to prepare dollars for them so they could take three people out of the ghetto. We didn’t treat this note seriously because we didn’t trust these people. The medicine for engineer Kramasztyk wasn’t useful because on August 10 a tragedy with a horrible outcome took place. Mundek, informant (in the diary), who knew that in Walowa 2 this group was hiding (the ones hiding knew that Mundek became an informant, but they couldn’t leave the shelter because of engineer Kramasztyk), debuted by denouncing the shelter where seven people were hiding, including the attorney Kirszenbaum.

The Germans blocked off Walowa 2 from the inside and the outside and began to crossfire the burned-out house. Then they ordered all the Jews to “descend” but no one appeared. The Germans brought ladders, and under the fire directed towards those hiding, Mundek was ordered to climb up the ladder, and the armed police was following behind him. Engineer Moszkowicz wasn’t able to use his gun in this situation. Everyone was backing away on the burned-out walls towards the burned-out house in Swietojanska 38. The backs of those running away were giving cover to engineer Moszkowicz. It was a race between, on the one hand, the agility of people and the aim of the murderers, and on the other hand, with the police climbing Mundek. At some point, one of the bullets hit dr. Tola Prywes (28 years old, maiden name Goldcwaig), who plummeted to the pavement of the courtyard from the height of a fourth floor. Attorney Kirszenbaum who was close to reaching the delusional safe location, was hit by a bullet and fell down onto the courtyard spikes. The rest of the people went back into the shelter. Lutek Prywes broke down totally. The wife of engineer Kramasztyk never left his side and didn’t attempt to leave. During the escape, engineer Moszkowicz shot the last bullets, protecting those running away, and now they were back in the shelter completely helpless, defenseless, totally devastated, and waiting for the unveiling of the events.

The Germans, under strong fire, entered the shelter and ordered everyone to leave. When they saw that engineer Kramasztyk didn’t move,



they shot him on the spot. Then the devastated wife started hitting the Germans with her fists. With this she encountered the same destiny as her husband. In the courtyard, Lutek Prywes kissed the cooling corpse of his wife, and together with engineer Moszkowicz he was taken away from our place to the place of murder. It's difficult for me to say whether at that time people were still being taken to the Umschlagplatz because a few days later, all the people were being shot to death in the former ghetto.

From this whole group one young girl was saved, as during her escape she hid in a burned-out room till night. I think she was engineer Moszkowicz sister. This person was completely broken down morally and exhausted physically after the events of the day. We helped her get situated in a shelter in Swietojska 34 in the fourth courtyard.

In our joint, Nalewka 27, nothing has changed. That is, Lolek's brother has risen to the occasion (explanations in the diary), and apparently, after being interrogated, took with himself to the grave the secret of our joint, and our group, and his suffering. The next day, after leaving the joint, we decided to go back every night to check up on sick Lolek, who was supposed to stay there till the day we would decide to be fine to live there again.

During nights we would usually split up in three groups. One would go to seek contact with the Jews still alive and to attempt to find "passage," a way of getting out of the ghetto-cemetery. The other group was busy finding food provisions that were hidden on various spots in the rubble (just in case if a shelter was found out, the food was spread out throughout the rubble so that the surviving people could use it), delivering water, and wood; apart from that, the members of that group were on guard so that no strangers would approach the group's turf.

The third, and the smallest, group under the direction of Pepi Kanal cooked meals for us made out of the articles we were able to accumulate. Usually during the night, they cooked bean or flour soups and pots of barley for the day (at that time there were 25 of us) that we ate when it was peaceful – and when not, we ate with a 24-hour delay. After such a day our throats were tightened, and physical fatigue and exhaustion caused the loss of appetite. At the joint, Lolek's health improved. We managed to stop the blood coming from his wounds, but it appeared that there were no chances to keep him alive.

On August 15, we decided to return to Nalewki 27 because the Germans didn't suspect anything about this particular joint, as we got convinced during our 8-day stay in the brush-makers district. Two days later

(July 17) there was quite a dangerous accident – considering our circumstances. Czarnoczapka, who went up to the attic in order to observe the courtyard Nalewki 23-25, had an accident. At a certain point, the floor gave way and he plunged from the height of the fifth floor penetrating with his body all decks till the bottom of the cellars. The falling body and tumbling down rubble were giving off a sound that could lead the Germans to us. When we looked down through the created precipice, we could see a pile of bricks, and at the bottom it was perfectly quiet so that we were convinced that Czarnoczapka didn't live. After a few minutes we heard his quiet moaning coming from the cellar. Immediately an armed rescue mission was underway. Carefully they entered the cellar where Czarnoczapka was lying. The action of taking him out from under the rubble was complicated by the fact that during the day one should not disturb the dead silence of the ghetto. Any disturbance of this odd peace could alert the Germans. After rescuing terribly injured bleeding Czarnoczapka from the cellar, who was unable to move, we needed to transfer him to the joint. And so, we met with unexpected obstacles and concluded that we needed to pull Czarnoczapka with the aid of ropes up to our joint. We were not able to do it during the day because the building where we were was directly in front of the gate leading to Nalewki street. We left Czarnoczapka in the hallway. Three people stayed with him and only at dusk did we lay him down on a board attached to the ropes and lifted him up to the joint. For a few days in the "wild territory" there has been no water, but it has been raining heavily, and we decided to use the rain. Till now, we've been using rain to shower in, but now we needed it for consumption. From the Grynbaum's shelter, we brought some hardboard to rig up a small roof over our joint. We equipped the roof with a small gutter made out of burned metal that we directed towards the balcony attached to the joint. There we lined up a chain of half-burned dishes in which we were catching rain water. When our first attempt was successful, the people from our group became obsessed with the activity of catching water and were outdoing each other in ideas how to do it. In the next days, when it kept raining we caught a lot of water in reserve, and we preserved it in burned zinc tubs and in various kinds of pots available to us.

On June 18 we found out that in Zamenhofa there was still a big group of Ostbahnhof fighters who went through many different battles, and at this time they lived amidst the rubble of burned-out houses, and just like we, they would like to get out of there. It was a rather sizable group of well-

armed young guys. They claimed that in one of their skirmishes they managed to kill Mundeck the informer.

On June 22 in the evening, when we left the joint wanting to get through to the brush-makers district, we noticed from afar the “kids garden” (that garden was on the corner of Nalewki and Franciszkanska). The garden was planted by the German Jews in 1942 on the site where a house was burned down in the beginning of the war in 1939. The inaugural opening ceremony of the garden, was even attended by engineer Czerniakow who gave the garden to the children so they could play there. There was a fire in the garden which surprised us since we knew it as an empty place now. It turned out that these were corpses of people shot to death and set on fire. We were able to contact “Red Jozek” again with whom we had been in contact since the end of May, that is from the moment he was able to return to his apartment (those Poles living within 30 meters from the ghetto needed to leave their apartments and only after some time were permitted to return). Red Jozek informed us that he was looking into a possibility of getting to us, and he would be able to do it in a few days. Next day he threw a letter to us in which he wrote to Szymek Kac (who was still with us) that he was in contact with his brother. The brother was promising to get Szymek Kac out.

Since that day, we have been coming to the brush-makers district and were standing next to the wall in Swietojska street opposite the house of “Red Jozek” and waiting for the sign with which he wanted to signal us when he would be coming. From day to day the situation was becoming worse. The people that got caught were no longer brought to the Umschlagplatz, but instead were shot dead right in the former ghetto. On July 24 in the afternoon, we heard the sounds of shooting coming from our courtyard at Nalewki 27. We thought that the Germans were surrounding us and were using the old method of scaring the victims with a continuous heavy gunfire. The Germans were loitering for a bit in the first doorway and only after half an hour moved into the courtyard. We were certain that they were coming closer to our joint. Szerszen gave us an order to get ready for a fight. We assumed the trained positions and were waiting to see how the situation develops. Such moments were many, but because we didn’t have enough ammunition, we were always forced to hold our nerves and not get provoked, but rather only defend ourselves or attack suddenly so as to reserve our ammunition. And so this time we also were waiting.

The Germans entered the second courtyard and started gathering burned pieces of wood left over from window and door frames. That wood they carried to the doorway where it was assembled in a pile. In the evening, the pile was set on fire which was a sign that the doorway to our building was turned into a crematorium. In the evening as we were leaving the joint, the fire was still burning, and you could see upper and lower limbs sticking out from the pile. Upon our return in the early morning, we saw not fully burned parts of corpses, for instance, a leg in a shoe, skulls, skeletons of the midsection, legs, and arms. The remnants of those bodies were still there when we were leaving the area.

At the end of June, our circumstances became drastically worse because the Germans started sending soldier squads at night. But our survival mode became somehow more stimulating. We became more emotional because leaving at night nobody knew if they would be coming back. When outside we attempted to attack small German units trying to scare them away from the ghetto so they wouldn't return. During the day, we doubled our guards, and we were sending out patrols to those places that were close to the streets bordering on our joint: Nalewki, Gesia, Zamenhofa. This way we wanted to find out when exactly at night German patrols came to our district, what their time frame was, which route they took, and how strong their numbers were. Till now we knew only that when they started to sing their hymn, they were ending their work for the day. Because their routine changed, we needed to find out what pattern their tactics followed now. We discovered that they patrol in threes or in fives, bring along an informer, and come to our district between 9 pm and midnight. Their newest tactics was to sprinkle flour on the paths in the neighborhood during dark nights in order to trace the Jews to their hiding places. Later they also used other signposts or traps, for example pieces of burned wood or bricks, to see whether people still came to these shelters. Because of that we needed to strengthen our vigilance and to be extra careful at night. There already has been a misfortune when people were returning with pails of water (from the cobblers district), and they were caught off guard and shot dead in Walowa 6. Among still living Jews, there were rumors that informants come to observe the Jews and where they go to hide, and then later bring the Germans to liquidate the last points of Jewish resistance.

At the end of June around midnight, Red Jozek arrived through the canals to the brush-makers district from the Polish neighborhood. Jozek Sladkowski (engineer, in textile business, a Jew) brother-in-law of Jozek—a

railroad man. Janek and Wlodek crossed to our district from the Old Town through the canals from the side of Kosciuszko coast, precisely through “buzowiec” (the central canal located under the Old Town) and through Franciszkanska Street sewer opening right next to the ghetto wall surrounding Bonifraterska Street. That particular manhole was partially stoppered. The traffickers unblocked the passage and got out to the surface. Our group, under heavy escort, transported Szymek Kac, his wife, mother and child, and the old Niemcowicz who until now was hiding in the shelter under the name of “jedenastka” (because this shelter was located in the “wild territory” in Walowa 11). The traffickers didn’t want to take anyone else this day, but Szymek Kac promised us that right after getting to the other side, he will organize help for the people from our group.

After getting out of the canals, Szymek Kac together with his family went to his previously prepared apartment in Leszno Street (to where Red Jozek escorted him). That same day, the doorman of that house in which the family of Kac stayed came to warn them that if they didn’t leave immediately, he would report to Gestapo that there were Jews in the building. Next day Szymek with his family was forced to leave the apartment and move to Hotel Polski.<sup>118</sup> A few days later, he sent a letter from the hotel, attention of Heniek Zemsz, in which he urged us to leave the ghetto and go to Hotel Polski because there is a possibility (for several thousand zlotys per person) to leave to Vittel. In that letter he described the first setup at the apartment and explained that the undertaking at Hotel Polski is run by well-known Jewish activists. He wrote that in this hotel, the Jews were able to move about freely and were absolutely safe, nobody monitored them, and that they were treated as foreigners and as such they were supposed to be interned in Vittel.<sup>119</sup> When the July action began, the Jews whose family

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<sup>118</sup> Hotel Polski (Polish Hotel) opened in 1808, was a hotel in the City Center of Warsaw in 29 Długa Street. In 1943 following the liquidation of Warsaw Ghetto, the hotel was used by Germans as a trap for Jews hiding in Warsaw. The German agents and their Jewish collaborators pretended Jews could buy foreign passports and other documents, and leave territories occupied by Nazi Germany.

<sup>119</sup> The German military command in occupied France established the Vittel internment camp in 1941 located in a resort in the Vosges Mountains of France near the German border. The SS sent to the Vittel camp Jewish

members were in the ghetto started buying land, in Paraguay, Uruguay, in the U.S., and in other countries, under the names of their families in the Warsaw ghetto so that their families could get permits to leave along with the citizenship of the country where they owned the land. I think that these efforts were also arranged by other social institutions abroad. Jews living abroad were sending to Poland permits, affidavits, and Palestinian certificates in order to save their families. In the meantime, the people to whom those certificates had been sent were already transported away to the extermination camps. Gestapo used those documents in that they were selling them to other Jews. In this way, they managed to lure to Hotel Polski many Jews who were hiding and wanted to secure their being. Szymek Kac wrote to us in his letter that he was able to communicate with the director Guzik who promised to give our group financial help so we could get to the Aryan district.

We have decided that after appropriate preparations in a few days we will leave the ghetto and go to Hotel Polski. Essentially, in our group there were vehement objections to this plan since Heniek Zemsz and Szerszen didn't want to be voluntarily in the hands of the Germans even for some time.

However, when most of them were in favor of going to the Aryan district, we needed to compromise in this situation. The agreement ended up being a decision of sending again three people, who were supposed to find out about the circumstances surrounding Hotel Polski and the stay there. In case a decision would be made about not participating in the Hotel Polski undertaking, our leadership already in the Aryan district was supposed to find connection to the partisans.

## July 1943

On July 2, the traffickers with Red Jozek and Szladkowski came again. Our group was supposed to open up the manhole located in Franciszkanska Street. The manhole in question was blown up with dynamite and backed up

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prisoners from outside France as hostages to exchange for German citizens interned abroad. Most of Vittel's Jewish detainees were deported to Auschwitz and murdered there in 1944.

with metal plates and rubble. Beforehand, we received a message from them (from the window of Red Jozek's apartment) that they will come around 2 am. Our group guarded manholes in Swietojska, Bonifraterska, Franciszkanska, Walowa – as a preventive measure against the German night patrols. Prepared this way, we began to dig through the debris. Shortly before 2 a.m. we could hear shots close by. After several minutes the shots died down. I thought that one of our patrols chanced upon a German patrol and drove it away. Exactly at 2 a.m., Red Jozek, Wladek, Janek from the Old Town, Jozek Szladkowski, and the brother-in-law of Rudy Jozek (railway man) emerged. They brought food along. With them we entered the courtyard in Franciszkanska 27, and the mystery of the shooting was solved. With a gun in his hand and as if in some ecstasy, Mosze Treger stood over the dead body of his son (a carrier from the supply warehouse), and half-whispering the words of a prayer he was repeating over and over one sentence: "I will revenge you, my son." It became clear that one of the German patrols got through our guards from the side of Walowa 8 and Franciszkanska 27 wanting to ambush us near the manhole that was observed by them. Mosze Trager together with his son cut them off. They were not in our shelter but were in contact with the group of Red Jozek and were awaiting food supplies. In Franciszkanska 27, they had their shelter with several other people. Mosze's son died but he himself forced the Germans to flee. Mosze's tragedy and his honorable and brave deed made an impression on the traffickers as they looked with recognition at this old unknown to them Jew (42-43 years old). Mosze the "carrier" was a heavy but well-built tall man. His son was extremely well liked by everyone. The traffickers offered Mosze to take him for free: "you went through such an ordeal, come with us" (they were climbing out of the manhole all naked dripping sweat, with heavy bags), but Mosze didn't want to leave the ghetto without getting the revenge. That night the traffickers were in our area till 4 a.m. Besides the food, they brought for us candles, matches, batteries, and newspapers. In exchange for the goods brought, they received a few sacks with clothes prepared by us from the goods found in the newly discovered shelters. Jozek Szladkowski told us that in the first days of the uprising he was taken together with his wife from the shelter located (if I remember correctly) in Swietojska Street 28. After the Umschlagplatz, they were put in the cattle cars; that train was destined for Majdanek. While on the way there, he tried to escape multiple times. He was able to jump off the train not too far away from Lublin, and he returned to Warsaw. In Warsaw he was looking for contacts with Jewish activists in the Aryan part of town, but

he failed. Nevertheless, he teamed up with Red Jozek and directed his whole energy towards saving the Jewish people in the ghetto. He was the one who organized those traffickers (he had Polish documents). Without any regard for the real danger, he was the first one to get into contact with the ghetto and kept it for a long time. He also told us that his father is hiding, to his joy, near Warsaw, and that the conditions in the Aryan district are very difficult and require a lot of financial resources. He himself doesn't have a place in the Aryan district and only because he knows the traffickers he was able to spend a night here and there. Jozek Szladkowski told us that he comes in the name of the party, and those traffickers he chose were known to almost all the Jews from the brush-makers district as relatively honest since they have been smuggling into the ghetto. I have to say that those people made a very good impression on me; they told us about the Soviet offensive, about the undertakings of underground Poland, and were consoling us that the day of freedom was coming. These people from "the other side" had a positive influence on us since they gave us hope, and their treatment of us as normal people gave us additional impetus for the continuation of living and poured into us the strength for the survival. Since the first days of the uprising, our first bigger moral success was the moment when the traffickers addressed us as "Pan."<sup>120</sup> After we became closer we would call each other "chlopcy."<sup>121</sup> Wladek from the Old Town was especially friendly; he worked as a sand digger in the Vistula River (25-6 years old). This time the traffickers didn't take anyone because they were afraid that after the incident in Franciszkanska 27, the Germans might surround all the manholes of the canals leading to the Polish district. They remained in the ghetto till the dawn so they could exit the canal during the day and see whether they were observed. We arranged that they would come back in three days at the same time (The moment when our joint in Nalewki 27 was found out is described in the diary). The remainder of the group that was saved installed itself in Nalewki 23-25 in the fourth courtyard where for some time the group of Zemsz was hiding before connecting up with us.

The next day in the new joint (July 4) was for us a great trial of self-control and composure. Beginning in the very morning, the Germans surrounded the whole territory and were searching through all the cellars

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<sup>120</sup> Mister

<sup>121</sup> Boys



and accessible rumble in the search of our group. Especially precisely they were searching around the fourth courtyard of the building on its right where the warehouses of Werterfassung (Nalewki 23-25) were located. They searched through all the rooms filled with the furniture while shooting inside the wardrobes. And in the rooms where the furniture was reaching the ceiling, they got rid of some furniture in order to look into rooms much closer for hiding people. They went into the building on the left side, where our joint was, a few times (we saw them all the time). To those unaware, who were looking up from downstairs, it looked as if the whole building were completely burned because only in the fourth and fifth floor some pieces of the ceiling were hanging. In this building, there used to be luxury 4-room apartments with kitchens and servant rooms that burned down completely during the fire, and the only saved structures were some ceilings that were hanging between the main walls as if they were some islands in the sea of burned out chimneys and tons of rubble. We lay on those ceilings all day long exhausted after the day before, and every time we heard a louder yelling of the Germans or the uproar of shots, on the faces of women and one child (Leos Zemsz) appeared tremendous despair and doubt. The men were indifferent knowing that there was no escape from this joint, and that the only rational way would be to sell your life in case of being discovered. This day passed under the sign of fear, and in the evening we found out that in our old joint in Nalewki 27 the Germans destroyed the little contraption we constructed for catching the rain along with our food supplies hidden in the rubble and the dishes for the water; they also poured out all the water we kept. The joint burned down. In one of the rooms, the only item that remained unscathed was a pocket knife and a small bag with a Tehillim that were hung on a nail inside one of the walls of the burned down room.

The Germans advanced in the desire to destroy so much that they even burned our underwear infested with lice. I'd like to add that that day the Germans had with them the "informant" whom they called by the last name of Tischler. At night the situation proved to be quite tragic because we didn't have neither water nor any products, but our genius Zemsz put us out of the misery. In the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> courtyard of the burned-down houses where the luxury apartments with comfortable furnishings were along with unscathed warehouses of Werterfassung, there were boilers. Heniek Zemsz was convinced that the boilers that didn't burst during fires must have water reserves. It turned out that really – several boilers that were only lightly touched with smoke – had still water in them. That water normally didn't

want to flow through the tabs because after it was turned off there was not enough pressure. With a nail, Heniek Zemsz made some openings in the boilers through which the water was dripping into our dishes. But we found out that we were losing too much water when we made the openings too low. Then Zemsz would estimate the capacity of a pail as compared with the spot intended for the opening and would make the poke exactly for the amount of water we needed. But the water wasn't everything. We needed to get the products again. Heniek Zemsz worked out a plan of digging under a warehouse of the former Szymek Kac's shelter. That night right away part of the group started working. The others were patrolling the area of the new joint, and some were sent to the former shelter of Czyste doctors from which they brought some products needed at the moment. We didn't use the shelter of the hospital Czyste eagerly since the entrance was in front of Gesia Street, and military police was present and they could either discover our dealings or close us off in the shelter (I write about the hospital Czyste shelter in the diary).

In the brush-makers district, the shelter of shoemakers was detected that day. And Blajwajsowa was saved from that shelter so we took her with us. She was a former owner of a house in Warsaw in Komitetowa Street 6 or 8. That shelter was set on fire by the Germans, but Blajwjasowa showed us the way through which you could reach the little tunnel where the radio of that shelter was located, some leather, and some shoes. We took the radio with us, and we hid the leather with shoes in the nearby rubble because we wanted to keep these things for the traffickers. At the new joint, I realized that anomaly of living in the ghetto caused emotional crisis in such a noble person as Zemsz since his feelings towards his wife changed. This man who was a good husband and even a better father changed his behavior towards his family because of the ghetto. After the first July action, the circumstances were such that the Zemsz family lived together with the Lewinson siblings. Zemsz fell in love with the young high-school graduate Lewinson (born in 1923)—she was about 8 or 10 years younger than his wife. While Zemsz's wife was in love with the younger Lolek Lewinson. That *ménage à quatre* was revealed and became even more pronounced at our new joint. We, the observers, perceived it as some sort of a bloody joke – a love idyll of the *ménage à quatre* in the atmosphere of fear and uncertainty; an idyll performed in the vast Jewish cemetery. Sometimes one could have a feeling that those people want to use their joy till the very last day of their lives. In this situation, the fate of the Zemszs' child was the worst. It was a thriving

boy who needed these days more warmth since he was ignored by the mother as a burden and relegated to the second place by the father, who still had feelings for him. We really liked the child, but during the day we could never talk, and during the night we didn't have time to talk or play with the child. He developed too early and was able to grasp our situation as if he were an adult. Just as other ghetto children, he tried to help us, and when his help wasn't needed Leos withdrew and kept silent till someone spoke to him. When we had a chance to distance ourselves from our every-day situation and be in a better mood, we played with Leos. In such moments our reality was replaced by the world of illusion. Often while playing we recalled images from the childhood, and it sufficed to look at him, and the sight of the stars and the moon reminded us about reality because we as children never played late at night.

On July 5, I learned that the shelter in Walowa 11 was found out in the "wild territory." That shelter was known as "11." After our skirmish with the Germans at Nalewki, Leon Grynberg left our group and went into that shelter in order to rest his nerves. That shelter was perceived as secure because it was well camouflaged, and not many people knew about it. The fact that it lasted so long was the best proof of its being out of harm's way. There were several young men there, and some of them had weapons. When it became evident that the Germans found it out, and they won't be able to sustain themselves inside the shelter, they came out as instructed by the Germans. During the process of forming a line outside, those young men made use of their weapons so that they were able break through the surrounding ring of the Germans and escape to the "wild territory," where they hid in the former shelter of Blajman in Gesia Street 13. This group tried later to make their way to the ghetto and subsequently disappeared from our horizon. I know that Leon Grynberg lives and resides in Palestine.

Our group started building the new shelter in the cellars of the second courtyard of that house. We were thinking that we could use it when winter comes. The smaller group worked on making the ceilings higher because these restrooms were very low and we needed more airflow. Every night when we were done with work, we masked the entrance so that the Germans wouldn't notice anything.

On this day (July 5), we spotted some prisoners from Pawiak who, under the escort of the Ukrainians, worked in the burned-down houses removing non-burned doors, window frames, and other valuable materials that they were taking to Wiezienna Street with the help of hand-pulled carts.

Next day (July 6), there were no changes in our surroundings. Since that morning it had been raining hard, and we were all soaked through; later in the afternoon we were lying on those broken up ceilings shivering, and because of cold we were huddling together when suddenly we heard an uproar, and we were buried in bricks and rubble. A big chunk of burned out and washed out wall that partially fell on us, broke through a ceiling near us falling with a big clamor to the bottom of the cellars. Some of us became superstitious and started to believe in miracles because if a bigger piece hit us we would have perished. At night, we installed a little roof to protect us from the rain.

When we recovered from the shock of the incident that took place yesterday at night (I wrote about it in the diary how Heniek Zemsz got shot), I found myself with Lewinson in our joint Nalewki 23-25, where we saw women with swollen eyes (three women: Zemsz, Blajwajs, Lewinson) and they were hugging us in disbelief seeing us still alive because all of them thought that we were caught by the Germans. It is strange and unexplainable how things turn out; strange are the changes that can take place in someone within a minute. On the face of desperate Zemszowa there appeared the emotions of being content bordering on being joyful when she found out that her lover was alive. However, the young girl Lewinson wasn't happy about finding her brother, and together with the little Leos was going mad with grief because of Heniek Zemsz. Her despair was our companion till the last day of her life.

On July 14, the traffickers together with Szladkowski came to us again and declared that this time they can take with them 5 people (for a price set in advance). At the meeting, we've decided to send Klonski, Felek Rozenberg, and Lejzor Szerszen, but Lejzor Szerszen didn't want to leave the group explaining his decision with his typical Semitic appearance. In his stead, Mietek Liwazer was chosen. In the joint, the frantic preparations to cross to the "other side" began. People were shaving with dull razors. Abram Starowiejski was playing the role of a hairdresser and was cutting the hair of the lucky ones. Then appropriate attire that most resembled that of the Aryans was chosen. Over the next hour, you had a feeling that all these people were getting ready for a mask ball because of how they were mixing and matching their clothing. From our clothing collection, a possibly clean shirt, a tie, a head covering, and matching shoes were meticulously chosen. And Klonski dressed in a worker's uniform, took a screwdriver and a worn-out cap in order to pretend to be a worker on the "other side." After the

masquerade was finished and the jury consisting of those staying behind was satisfied with the results, the envoys were sent to the manhole where they were awaited by the traffickers. Our delegates were directed by us to the Aryan district in order to ascertain the situation around the mysterious Hotel Polski where we wanted to go later. That day, Salek Wislicki was supposed to go with them, but his leg was unfortunately wounded so that he dragged himself to the brush-makers district, but the traffickers didn't want to take him because they could carry him only part of the way through the canals but not where the sewer was high, and dragging himself on his knees he would drown. Wislicki had been eager to go to the other side for the longest time because he had a substantial money deposit with the director Przanowski at the Bank Kredytowy (Moniuszki Street 12). He and Lutek Prywes left the deposit of \$2,500 and valuable jewelry at director Przanowski's discretion. This money and other valuables were set aside for the purchase of "karta zycia" to Vittel. Just in case we needed help with finding a place to stay, Salek Wislicki authorized Felek Rozenberg to withdraw a sum of money from dr. Przanowski in the Aryan district. I forgot to add that in May I received such an authorization from Ludwik Prywes who thought that if I were to rescue myself, I would need some initial spending money in the Aryan district.

That evening Blajwajc asked me to accompany her to the Aryan district because, as she claimed, I had good Aryan looks, and she wanted to take advantage of my Aryan contacts. On her part, she promised she would support me with her money. I turned her offer down because I didn't want to leave Szerszen and Levinson, however, I offered her to join our delegation, but she refused as she had nowhere to go. Since a few days, we had been hearing strange thuds at night coming from the cellars in Nalewki 21 that we, seasoned "rubble men" deciphered as working artesian wells. Yet the location of those wells was still a mystery. On July 15, we noticed a few silhouettes moving out of the burned cellar in the fourth courtyard Nalewki 21. Those figures were looking around fearfully and headed towards Nalewki. Since we wanted to find out who these people were, we sent our lookout who came into contact with them there. It turned out that these are people from Kaniel's group, who were still hiding in the undiscovered shelter at Nalweki 21. These people knew about our stay at Nalewki 23-25, but they didn't want to encounter us. Since that day, we decided to keep in touch by meeting in the brush-makers district because regardless of everything, they didn't want to show us their shelter, and we didn't want to reveal our joint to them. Having listened to our plan of getting out of the ghetto to the Aryan

district, they didn't accept our plan because they thought their shelter was impossible to be discovered. Yet, they asked us to put them in touch with the traffickers since they wanted to get some products, candles, matches, and electrical flashlights because they were having a hard time without these things. The secretive artesian well was located at their shelter.

The days were passing by and the traffickers, having taken our delegates to the Aryan district, didn't appear. We made several efforts to get into contact with Red Jozek throwing little stones at his apartment windows, however without any result. Yet, through the closed curtains, we saw that there were people there. All the more, the silence of the man who was our only recourse seemed strange. The obstinate stillness of Rudy Jozek and the absence of the traffickers suggested to us that the whole group of traffickers along with our people was caught by the Germans. In our circumstances, every new sign, every change, gun shots, buzzing, or rustle needed to be deciphered by us and commented on so that we could react quickly to them at any given time. All the Jews in hiding were suddenly possessed by a persecution complex, so that this sudden breaking off the contact we commented on lead us to conclusion that our safety is directly endangered. However, we were too exhausted to find a new hiding place. Every few days, we tried anew to establish contact with the traffickers, and the lookouts spent many nights awaiting our "saviors" at the manhole. Weeks have passed and our "messengers of life" didn't appear. At the end of July (between 15 and 22), looking through binoculars we noticed in Pawia Street (our joint, fifth floor Nalewki 23-25 was located vis-à-vis Pawia Street) a big group of people in civilian clothes carrying luggage lead by the Germans. After a while, an order was given to pile up the luggage in one spot. The people were then ordered to form columns. At the outlets of Pawia Street, the Ukrainians with machine guns were posted, and the Germans started firing into the crowd from the machine guns. The crowd swayed as if it were a field of wheat being cut (about 150 people) and fell to the ground staining it with blood. After the gunfire ceased, the Ukrainians brought a lot of wood and started burning the corpses in the lot. At that time, I also saw how the Germans escorted through the ghetto, along Zamenhof Street from the direction of Stawki going towards Pawia, a large troop of Soviet soldiers (over 1000 people) who were marching in wooden shoes and were looking around the area new to them. And again, in Pawia Street, some Soviet prisoners were shot because they accidentally got out of the line.

Since April 19 till today, the shooting of the German guards or the patrols hasn't stopped even for a moment neither during the day nor during the night; the same goes for the clamor of grenades being set off in the ghetto. Conversely at the end of July, the Germans started to systematically blow up the burned-out houses in the ghetto. In this manner, they were trying to destroy the last resistance areas of the Jewish fighters, the last of the Warsaw ghetto Mohicans.

From that day on, we've been aware of the new perspective on our lives in the ghetto, which meant that some day we might blow up together with the rubble of our joint. At this moment, the Germans were restricting themselves to blowing up the burned-out houses in the central ghetto.

In the first day of August, when we sent two of our people to find out whether the traffickers of Jozek Szladkowski arrived to our district, these two people never returned to our joint; they were Salek Wislicki and Festinger. The next day, we searched the brush-makers district, the part of the street near the manhole, and all known to us places where those people could possibly stop, but we didn't find them anywhere, neither dead nor alive. Our group adopted a new routine, which till now had not been practiced, that those people leaving for the district at night would say goodbye to those staying behind in the joint. We also managed to dig underneath Szymek Kac's warehouse with provisions from which we pulled out products in inhumane conditions. After strenuous work, we managed to dig a narrow tunnel of half a meter and 60 cm under the floor of a cellar bathroom in the former shelter of Szymek Kac where the warehouse was. In a rather makeshift manner, we secured the tunnel and part of the opening that we made in the floor of the warehouse. Nevertheless, the whole operation of getting the products out required almost acrobatic agility. The way we proceed is the following: one of us is lying on his back over the opening while the other is shining the light on it with a flashlight. Next to the person lying down, there is a big piece of cloth, and in the opening with a razor, a cut in a sack is made. Then the food from the sack is wrapped up in that piece of cloth and transported through the little tunnel to the surface and poured inside a bag. Our meals depended on which sack we stumbled upon. The first time, we chanced on a sack of sugar, and for several days we kept eating sugar and drinking water from the boiler. Some other time, we managed to get only barley or flour. One single time, we came across a sack with crackers that were totally mildewed, and flour was calcified. We were breaking it with the bricks.

On August 10, we received a message from Red Jozek's window that this night they will visit us. At a certain point, we thought it was German setup. Exercising every possible precaution, we neared the manhole at the arranged time. This time, Jozef Szladkowski, Wladek, Janek, and the brother-in-law of Rudy Jozek emerged, but Rudy Jozek wasn't among them. The traffickers didn't bring anything along because right now they wanted to restore the broken communication. Jozek Szladkowski told us that after bringing Klonski, Liwazer, and Rozenberg out of the ghetto, he hid them on the Kosciuszki shore in a wooden church, which they were supposed to leave during the rush hour, blend in with the crowd, and head toward Hotel Polski. But before that, Rudy Jozek took Klonski's weapon. The traffickers, being Aryan, went home after five (the curfew must be observed in the Aryan district), but, as bad luck would have it, Red Jozek was held up by a guard patrolling the walls of the ghetto on Swietojska, where he lived, and after checking his identification they searched him and found the ill-fated gun. The Germans took Rudy Jozek to Aleje Szucha where they tortured him since he was suspected to be one of the activists from the Polish underground.<sup>122</sup> From there, he was taken to Pawiak, for about two weeks, and later he was sent to Auschwitz. In the meantime, a group of traffickers fell apart, and each of them was in hiding because they were not sure whether Rudy Jozek would give them away. Jozek Szladkowski told us also that in the middle of July, the Germans suddenly pulled up in front of Hotel Polski, with the tight cordon they closed off the entrance, covered all other entrances, and loaded all the Jews who were staying there into the cars that took them to Pawiak. Only a few Jews were able to escape from Hotel Polski. Our three people didn't make it to Hotel Polski. On the first day after leaving the ghetto, they went to Nowiniarska Street to some Polish acquaintances and arranged to meet up with Jozek Szladkowski. He was supposed to get from them further instructions for our group, but every trace of them was lost. Together with Jozek Szladkowski, we came to conclusion that the people taken from Hotel Polski are the same who were shot dead in Pawia Street.

In the meantime, Blajwajs agreed to pay the traffickers to lead the rest of our group to the Aryan district; these were: Lewinson, Czarnoczapka,

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<sup>122</sup> For a new perspective on the Polish underground see: Joshua D. Zimmerman, *The Polish Underground and the Jews, 1939-1945*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015.



Starowiejski, Szerszen, Blajwajs, Lewinson-woman, Zemsz-woman, Leos, Zemsz, and I. However, after a debate with Jozek Szladkowski, it was established that we could go under the condition that right away in the morning hours each of us would leave alone to his/her Aryan acquaintance. He could only handle taking us to the Kosciuszko shore and leaving us there. However, he suggested to us to take risk again and send one trusted person from our group who could find a place with some Aryan people in order to hide all our people right after they leave the canal. We agreed with Szladkowski's idea, and this time our choice was Lolek Lewinson since he was the one leaving with us his sister and his lover, which guaranteed us that he would return if he lived. Blajwajs gave \$40 in gold to cover the cost of his transfer to the Aryan district and to possibly put some money down on an apartment. The traffickers took \$20 for the transfer itself, and Lolek kept the other \$20 for himself. This time I took a risk and gave Lewinson the address of Captain Miller at the Oppel plant because I thought that only he was able to take us to the partisans. I didn't see any other solution in our situation, and Szerszen, Abram Starowiejski, and I didn't want to hide any longer. That night, Lewinson left for the Polish neighborhood. We arranged with the traffickers that in eight days they will be back with Lewinson, and in the meantime they promised to bring us food. At the joint we frantically started the preparations needed for getting to the "other side."

The preparations entailed getting some sun tan during the day, if possible, so as to mask our paleness and killing the bugs we were infested with. Meanwhile at night we went to the shelter of the doctors from the hospital Czyste in order to find appropriate clothing for us and valuable clothing for the traffickers who were supposed to get us out of here. Clothing was treated by the traffickers as the currency. During one such visits to the doctors' shelter where Szerszen and Czarnoczapka went an unforeseen incident happened. When they were busy looking with the help of the light of a candle and from time to time with the flashlight (in order to save the battery), suddenly they were blinded by a strong light of a reflector that was approaching them. In this empty dead-like shelter about which we only knew – at least we thought so – the appearance of an unknown person was a sign that a German was approaching. Szerszen loaded the gun and he would have fired, but the voice coming from beyond that light yelled in Yiddish: "don't shoot, I'm a Jew." The mysterious arrival followed Szerszen's order and turned off the light and approached my buddies in the light of the flashlight held by Abram Starowiejski. Then they noticed that the mysterious man was

dressed in a flyer jacket and a leather pilot and was wearing boots. Under his arm, he was carrying a parcel of a medium size. The mysterious man spat out the following words: “boys, don’t be afraid of me, put away your guns. Nothing will hurt you. I’m looking for Jews and want to communicate. You should know that I work for the Befehsstelle, and my name is Tischler. I have been coming to this shelter for several days now; I have been looking for Jews, but I couldn’t find any. I am so happy that I have met you because I want you to know that there is a regime change in Italy, and I want you to spread the message. The Allied forces landed in Sicily.<sup>123</sup> These are quite auspicious circumstances for us Jews. There have been changes at the Befehlstelle. Some of the officers were sent to Italy in order to control the situation. Others are getting ready to leave. The proof of this truth is that till now at the Befehlstelle in the barracks of Zelazna 103 over 60 Jews were held. These people were shot dead a few days ago. The Germans left only 8 “informants,” and among them Mundek Furman, I Tyszler, and 6 others not known by their names to my companions. Tyszler continued that they were expecting to be killed too, but because he managed to look at the file where the Germans carefully recorded all the shelter locations that they had uncovered, he noticed an entry about the doctors’ shelter (in Gesia 3), “Gesprengt.”<sup>124</sup> That is why the “informants” decided to use this information and after the planned escape from the Befehlstelle, they would hide in this shelter. At the moment each of them who has a night duty with the Germans brings to this shelter food, candles, matches, and even weapons. And again, to prove that he was not lying, he showed my comrades a few bags of sugar that he brought from the former shelter of Kagan (that was found out in Nalewki, where many products were). My comrades who knew the doctors’ shelter well, verified that before that there had not been any sugar there. He unpacked the parcel that he brought and showed us the candles and matches intended for use later in the shelter. Tyszler also informed my comrades about the German patrols operating in the former ghetto district during the night. He claimed that they would leave the Befehlstelle starting

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<sup>123</sup> Operation Husk was a code name for the Allied invasion of Sicily in which the Allies took the island of Sicily from the Axis powers (Italy and Nazi Germany). It was a large amphibious and airborne operation, followed by a six-week land campaign that started the Italian Campaign.

<sup>124</sup> Blown up and demolished

at 9 pm till 1 am at night and at 2 am till 5 am. He advised us to avoid them during these hours. Additionally, he revealed a secret that these patrols usually hide at the street crossings and at night to observe the movements of the hidden people by closely monitoring and listening to voices, murmurs, and knocks that help them to locate the people to be yet caught. Tyszler offered that we could stay in this place starting tomorrow while they would deliver food, weapons, ammunition, and in a few days they would escape and join us in this shelter. Szerszen arranged with him that since they all will live here, we will also come here in four days. In the meantime, various thoughts kept coming to Szerszen's head about how to disable the informant. Finally, Szerszen decided that it didn't make any sense to waste a bullet on him. Szerszen together with Czarnoczapka terrorized Tiszler, tied him with a cord, searched his pockets, took his flashlight, and left the shelter leaving him to his fate. Szerszen explained himself that based on what the informant was telling them, in a few days his companions will come to the shelter and will rescue him after two or three days. He was counting on being able to control them in the future. However, if Tiszler lied and his arrival was some cruel trick, then he should die of starvation in this shelter. That night, Szerszen didn't bring anything from the shelter, and when they were backing away from it, they saw the silhouettes of policemen who were walking on Gesia Street towards Nalewki. We decided to observe closely all the moves of the German patrol to find out whether Tiszler's information was true. Besides that we had an intention of sneaking up on the shelter in four days to determine whether his companions arrived. Tyszler's story was unresolved and even with the best explanation, it left us with mixed feelings. On the one hand, it was a pity that we lost an accessible shelter with clothing; on the other hand, we felt some kind of satisfaction that if those informants were to hide here, just in case any of us survive, they will be able to testify against him. Or in the worst-case scenario, in case of a setup, their fate will be dependent on us.

After four days, when the four of us approached the shelter, it turned out that all the entrances leading inside the shelter were blocked with rubble, and it was impossible to get inside. With bricks we knocked on the only chimney sticking out from that rubble (described in the diary) in order to find out whether someone is inside. But after a while we heard the noise of falling bricks, and in the distance we noticed some silhouettes in helms sneaking up on us. We were backing out on the top of the rubble in the direction of an opening in a gable known to us in the house of Nalewki 27 (to

where we could get from Gesia 5), and during our maneuvers, the Germans must have seen us and opened fierce fire towards us. Thanks to our familiarity with all the rubble, we were able to escape to Nalewki 27 and from there to Zamenhofa 24, and then veering through the courtyards we managed to return to the joint.

We came back half alive, and Szerszen couldn't forgive himself for not shooting Tyszler. Till today I don't know what happened during those four days to that shelter. But we were unable to go back to that shelter regardless of our repeated attempts (more about it in the diary including the death of Lewinson and Leos). They took Blajwajs (those left were Szerszen, Czarnoczapka, I, Lewinson in the Polish district, Starowiejski, Zemszowa). We talked about yesterday's escape after being discovered. Szerszen claimed that it was God's miracle, and the comrades were praising Szerszen. Abram Starowiejski absentmindedly threw a wire down from the window (antenna wire) and started sliding down on it, right after him Czarnoczapka was going down sliding, after him Zemszowa, I, and Szerszen. Suddenly you could hear the voice of Abram Starowiejski who was asking to save him because he got tangled up in the wire and was hanging suspended in the mid air (at the height of the second floor). Czarnoczapka, sliding down and not knowing that Starowiejski is hanging like that, hit him full force with his legs but quickly realized the situation and grabbed on to a sticking out molding – of the former low building (in the third courtyard Nalewki 21) adjacent to the main wall of Nalewki 23-25 (where our joint was) – and after that he jumped into the rubble in the courtyard. "Getting down" Zemszowa stopped at the molding and was looking around helplessly not knowing what to do, and apparently she chickened out of jumping down. When I came down sliding, I saw Czarnoczapka down there lying, and not thinking for too long I jumped down from the molding. As my friends told me later, I was lying there unconscious with a cut eyebrow from which the blood was pouring out because most likely while jumping I hit an edge of a brick. Again Szerszen kept his cool while sliding down, and as he stood on the molding with the typical British composure he took out a razor from his wallet, and when it wasn't helpful he peacefully got out Starowiejski's leg from the tangled up wire. At that moment, there were bullets flying around him since the Germans realized that we were running away. When we all gathered in the courtyard, Czarnoczapka i Szerszen dragged me with all their might with them. Only after a few moments I regained consciousness, and the thunder of gunshots made me realize that we needed to save ourselves by escaping.



## August 1943

That day at the dusk (August 18) we decided to go to the brush-makers district in order to wait at the manhole for the traffickers together with Lolek Lewinson from the Aryan neighborhood. But this time, we firmly decided to leave the cemetery-ghetto. Filled with pain and wounded our group-stump was moving along in the district like a cripple leaving the battlefield. Starowiejski, resting on the companions, was limping on one leg because he couldn't move the other one, and we all bandaged our hands and other wounded body parts with rags and were grinding our teeth in pain. Still, we carried even greater pain in our wounded hearts as we were passing by all the familiar buildings that opened our bleeding wounds anew. At midnight the traffickers came, most importantly with Szladkowski and Lewinson. After they left the manhole, we all needed to hide because we heard footsteps of the German patrol approaching from Bonifraterska Street. The traffickers brought tomatoes, fruit, and lard. They brought these because a few days earlier they had delivered different products that vanished at the joint in Nalewki 23-25 (described in the diary).

After a short exchange with Lewinson our enthusiasm about the Aryan district became quickly lukewarm. Lewinson said that going to the Aryan district is the same as committing suicide, and that in our current circumstances we still have the possibility to vegetate. Lewinson told us that he found Captain Miller, but even this time we had bad luck as Captain Miller was away on holiday. After leaving the ghetto, Lolek went to live with his Aryan friend in Poznanska Street, and two days later there was a setup in that house. A Jewish family who was hiding was caught and shot dead together with their protectors, the Aryan family that was hiding them; the Germans confiscated their whole movable possessions from that apartment. This new reality forced Lolek to leave the hospitable apartment at his acquaintances, and from that day on Lolek spent the nights in the rushes on the riverbank of Vistula. When he turned to the Aryan people he knew, everyone was comforting him, and he was even invited to have meals together, but getting a place to sleep remained in the sphere of dreams, that is, there was no chance to hide in their homes.

All day, every day, Lolek tried to find some place for us to stay at least during the first day after leaving the canals. Unfortunately, he wasn't able to

find anything. He told us that in the Aryan neighborhood it was impossible to move around without proper documents, and it's much more difficult to function without money than in the ghetto. Eight days in the Aryan district were one horrible chain of disappointments. Lolek together with Szladkowski was trying to find for us some potential dwelling place (he was counting on the money from Blajwajs), but unfortunately, that also was impossible to arrange. Admittedly Szladkowski had an idea of buying a villa for all of us in the vicinity of Warsaw, but even all of us together who survived from our group didn't have enough money to give them and be able to move in.

After Lolek recovered from all the experiences on "the other side," he was very surprised that all of us came leaving his sister, little Leos, and Blajwajs alone. When we explained the whole situation, Lolek started having spasms, and Polish traffickers agreed to take us without money, but this time Lolek was also against it, as he claimed that immediately after entering the Aryan district we will fall into the hands of the Germans. After a short debate (there were some opinions that if we were to die, then rather together with all the Jews), we decided to return to our joint, and Szladkowski promised to keep trying to find a place for us to stay. In the meantime, he also promised to keep delivering food for us. We arranged with them that they would come to us in five days. The traffickers left the ghetto before the dawn, and we, completely resigned to our fate, with bawling Lewinson dragged ourselves to the joint (August 18).

The edifice we erected and nurtured in our minds, which was supposed to grant us asylum of the imaginary "paradise" on "the other side," fell into pieces. Instead of a paradise, we were thrown to the bottom of hell. During the experiences I underwent at the new joint in Pawia Street 22, many-a-time I thought about how some ghastly beliefs, myths, or folk legends can, in all their nakedness, be put into practice. In our case, the legend about seven hells that we had heard in the childhood began to realize itself because every joint was some level of hell. In Pawia 22, we found ourselves on the one side in front of Pawiak, and the main wall of our building was adjacent to Gesia Street where one division of Pawiak was (this was the Jewish prison). In Pawia, the corner of Wiezienna, the Germans rebuilt a burned-out house on which after a few days a sign "Officers' Canteen" appeared. In the building on the right, there was an abandoned partially burned synagogue in which charred old bibles and other religious books were lying around. In the courtyard, there was a square with many

kitchen dishes. These were the traces of Werterfassung's work.<sup>125</sup> Along Pawia Street, the guards of the German police, grenade police, and prison guards were dispersed to patrol Pawiak. The whole Pawiak territory was well lit with reflectors fastened to the guard towers. Only when air raid alarms sounded, which was quite often during that time, the reflectors were turned off and the SS guard left Pawiak to hide in the cellars of the burned-out houses.

A few days after our arrival to this place, there was an alarm that brought several Germans to the building in which we were. And again we felt satisfied with the fact that the Germans were forced to hide with us as equals. From the side of Gesia Street the voices of people talking in Russian, French, and other languages we didn't understand were coming to us. At the former merchant square where during 1942 people in the ghetto were selling old things, the Germans erected barracks, and in those barracks, surrounded with barb wire during the first days, there were people dressed in blue-striped uniforms and the Soviet prisoners of war. Every day, Polish workers from the Polish neighborhood were escorted in columns by the Ukrainians to this place to build barracks and to erect a cement wall. It seemed to me that this work was carried out in three shifts because every single night we heard the grinding sound of the saws, the tapping of the hammers, and the reflectors illuminated the whole square.

We associated the new "structure" with some mechanized factory of death that was being constructed in the heart of Warsaw. Sometimes we allowed ourselves to joke that we were some foreign diplomatic mission guarded all around by the patrols. In this joint, different degrees of degradation to which the Germans brought the occupied populations became emphasized. At the highest level stood the arrogant but at the same time cowardly German of whom Polish Pawiak guards were afraid. All the innocent inmates locked away in the cells trembled before his power. And we, the Jews, were afraid of all people. But it turned out that still there are alive creatures that are afraid of us. These were the mice and rats that ran away from the cellars that we searched in hopes to find water or some lost bag with some food. This joint had its positive side, namely, while we were in the belly of the beast, we were relatively least suspected of being here. Yet,

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<sup>125</sup> In the Nazi Germany the policy of Wertfassung required companies to issue shares gratis to social establishments.



the approximate neighborhood of two prisons forced us to be on our guard at all times. And this joint had its bad sides also that turned it into a place of the last seven hells. It was impossible to make fire there, to cut wood, or to make any sort of noise at all, that is, we were even afraid to whisper to each other. During these five days while waiting for the "courier of live," we nurtured ourselves with the lard and fruit, allowing for only very small portions, and during the night we collected some water from the abandoned dishes in the square of our courtyard where the rain water has been gathering for the past few weeks. That water was standing most of the time in all kinds of dirty dishes so that it resembled some sticky jelly-like mixture of water, mud, rain water, and other unclean particles. Such water we filtered through rugs, and then drank it. During the day, we were lying on the ceiling suspensions basking the wounds on our sore hands in the sun.

After five days, we went to the manhole taking with us the hidden radio set in order to pay off the food that we were hoping to receive. We awaited with anxiety a message from Szladkowski that would decide about our future. When we got to Franciszkańska 27 and looked towards the manhole, we noticed next to it some silhouettes of armed policemen. We hid in the cellars, and every 15 minutes we looked out the gate to see what was going on but till 3 am the situation didn't change. At 3 am the German patrol left, and once we got there, we discovered that it was tightly sealed and the process of opening it up again in order to get to the canals would take at least a few days of work. That day the traffickers didn't come, and the dawn caught us in the brush-makers district all depressed in this newly emerged situation. During the day we remained in the Świetojńska 38 in the rubble of the burned-down house because during the daylight we couldn't get across to our joint in Pawia 22. That night we tried to establish contact with the apartment of Red Jozek. Our attempts didn't bring anything. We needed to roll up our sleeves and to work in the tunnel of the former shelter of Kac in order to get to some food. After intense work, we came across a bag of rock-hard salt, and having found nothing else we returned to Pawia slaloming through different courtyards. At that time the Germans proceeded to burn all the corpses lying in the courtyards and streets decomposing. The pace of the demolition of the burned down houses intensified. In the burned down house on the side of Gesia Street bordering with Pawia 22, Polish workers started taking down some walls and were transporting the bricks to the site where the new mysterious buildings were being constructed. During the day, we became agitated with the visits of prison guards in our courtyard. These

guards entered the cellars and took out various kitchen dishes, plates, and other household items. For them it was only looting and for us the moments of “emotions”; moments that shortened our lives by years. It was a time when we were afraid of people and couldn’t trust them. A few times at night, we were sneaking to Gesia Street (through a tunnel going under the cellars), and we left a note saying: “leave some bread for starving prisoners, but these notes didn’t bring anything, and it seemed to us that they might call attention to all the burned-down buildings around us and at the same time to our joint. We decided to start preparing for a possibility of being busted. The work geared towards our plan in this building was burdensome and very tedious. You couldn’t hit the bricks since every kind of noise could lead the guards to us. If we wanted to connect with the other buildings on top, we had to dig the holes in the cement in-between the bricks with the burned nails. Working like this, after a few days we were able to connect to the house in Pawia 24 and Lubeckiego. Besides me and Lewinson, nobody was able to move their hands, and so they couldn’t carry out any work. During a few nights we went to the brush-makers district to get into contact with people, the apartment of Rudy Jozek, and get something to eat. We managed to find a hidden bag with barley, and for the longest time we didn’t see any traces of people. At that time the situation with the water became catastrophic because from the property in Nalewki 23-25 the Germans hauled off some of the boilers and put bullets through others letting the water out. When it was raining (at the end of August) we went through the courtyards, when only possible, and gathered water from some left dishes and puddles and creeks.

At the end of August, during one of the visits next to the manhole we met Mosze Trejger with a few people who were awaiting our traffickers because on their side the food was running out, yet, the traffickers didn’t show up. Lolek Lewinson with some other person decided to get to the Polish side through the canals, that he was already familiar with, to buy some food and get back to the group. We attempted to unclog the manhole, but it turned out that it was jammed with rubble of a few good meters. We wouldn’t have been able to finish this task within one night. That night together with the companions of Mojsze Trejgej (porter) we succeeded in getting rid of all the rubble from the manhole, and after we were done, we pulled a wagon over it since the Germans had left it like that. However, the next day in that place there was a huge pile of rubble with sticking out pieces

of wood, rods, and metal sheets. Under these circumstances, there was no slight chance of us ever getting to the canals through this manhole.

At the end of August, we managed to get a bag of barley, some beans, and a bag of sugar from the former shelter of Szymek Kac. We also got access to other products from that storeroom, but we were afraid to take more because we couldn't transport it all safely to our joint. To Zamenhof Street we got through the openings of burned-down houses, and along Nalweki and Zamenhof we crawled while from Zemenhof 13 to Pawia 22 we got by slaloming between different courtyards, cellars, and hallways of various houses between Pawia and Gesia. To this joint, we couldn't lift up high any bags on ropes because this would be visible to the guards from Pawiak. In order to get to the joint, we climbed the remaining parts of the iron skeleton that used to be the stairway. We became so nimble after having enough practice that we were able to carry the bags with provisions on our backs. Finally, we needed to solve the problem of cooking these products. We came up with an idea of installing a small iron stove we found in one of the bathrooms where there was only a small opening after a little window along with the opening left after a door. We covered the large opening with some rags so that the light from the fire wouldn't show outside. It was much more difficult to find wood for fire. On the lower level, we noticed some sticking out pieces of not fully burned wooden floor. It turned out that only some of the floor burned fully, and the rest was covered with the rubble. After removing the rubble, we were able to get the flooring that we used as fuel. The situation looked even worse with getting the fire started. We created the fire with a piece of glass and stones used for the lighters that we had in our stash. We smoked a lot of cigarettes drying near the fire all kinds of weeds and leaves picked from the acacia tree in Walowa Street 11. We wrapped this blend in papers found in different cellars. Now we were strongly influenced by the fact that our group wasn't as strong as before, and that from our original group there were only remnants left. Because so many houses were being demolished now, it was more difficult to hide. While hiding in the bunkers, we were expecting that one day we would get buried alive under the rubble from the houses being demolished. The joints were also no longer safe because the Germans were getting rid of whole blocks so that one could get caught inside an area being demolished by explosives with no way out. Additionally, we were running out of ammunition. From the first days of September, we were trying anew to get into contact with the traffickers of Red Jozek. During some nights we couldn't pass German patrols to get to the

manhole. Some nights we came very close to the manhole, but we couldn't do anything because the German guards were observing it continuously. Nobody replied to our old signals directed at Rudy Jozek's window. All attempts to contact the shelters of Kaniol, Mojsze, Trejgera, or Mellona, (where his parents were) of which we knew that they still existed, were futile because we didn't know the proper access. We only knew the area where the shelter was located. Those bits and pieces of information turned out not to be enough in order to get inside those shelters through the unknown masked passages. Beginning in August, people living in those shelters didn't leave them eagerly because they were afraid of the German night patrols. It was also difficult to contact anyone from the groups hiding that we knew from our nightly searches. People became much more secretive, distrustful, to the point that they were afraid of their own shadow. At night, when marching through the former ghetto and searching for people, tunnels leading to the Polish neighborhood, or manholes, we saw many times people's shadows sneaking around in the streets or running away from manholes, but they never stopped when we yelled after them. From the beginning of September, we were completely cut off from the Polish district, chased after by the Germans day and night, and seemingly out of favor with the hiding brother Jews. Under these circumstances, the situation was becoming more hopeless every day, and we were becoming savage in this small group. It appears to me that only the higher power was able to sustain our good relations with each other. The only change that happened was between Lewinson and Zemszowa. Lewinson couldn't forget the death of his sister, and that must have been the reason for his cold treatment of Zemszowa. Zemszowa emphasized her contentment about the tragic death of her son because she suspected we will die a much more horrible death, a death of starvation that was approaching us slowly. Czarnoczapka was becoming indifferent and lost in the present situation. This was a reaction caused by physical exhaustion and coming to terms with his destiny. Starowiejski still demonstrated his vigor and didn't lose his faith that if we live till late fall, we will be able to get out of the ghetto and find asylum among the Poles because, as he claimed, the political situation must be ready for changes by then. I was foreseeing that the ghetto would be guarded by the German guards only till half of the year since the date the uprising had started. Besides that, I was waiting for the moment when the Germans would demolish the front of Bonifraterska Street because I figured that the rubble from these houses would destroy the wall of the ghetto, and that the

Germans won't be putting up a new wall around the rubble this time. I thought when a few houses get demolished along Bonifraterska, one could hide in the rubble and at night cross to the Polish side – even if the guards of the former ghetto were there – and in Nowiniarska Street in the burned houses (from the military action in 1939) one could hide till the morning.

Szerszen was full of trust and enthusiasm that we were still alive and saw it as a sign of God. He was the only person in our group that endured all kinds of chastisements because he didn't lose the only precious human treasure, that is, the faith. He continued believing in God. My creed was Polish district and the resistance, the partisans, but according to the news reaching us and from those that Lewinston shared with us, it followed that we were not needed. Then I started doubting my belief, and the imaginary edifice of my believing in "the other side," and the people from "the other side" began to wobble and escape. Only the trust in my own strength was left like a slowly smoldering flame. September was the worst month for us out of all of those months we lived through in the former ghetto now turned into a monumental cemetery. The echoes of the battles have quieted down, and all the contacts with people have been severed. The horrifying hunger has begun, and our perspective turned into our stupid death, pointless to everyone. I also suffered through a moment of the unspeakable pain of realization that the whole Warsaw Jewry in its glory has perished. Indeed, till now it all revolved around delusions that there are shelters in which many people are still hiding, that there are groups that are fighting, that there are Jews. And in September the emptiness was lurking from everywhere, and the volcanic-like openings left after the shelters startled us with their empty eye sockets from where the stench of decomposing bodies was coming. During quiet nights, there wasn't even a murmur to hear from those hundreds of burned-down houses, and in the countless streets there was nothing to be found but the heaps of rubble, corpses, and the German patrols.

The only sign of a few Jews being alive was the fact that in this cemetery of colossal dimensions we were still being guarded at night by the German guards positioned along the walls and during the day by searching squadrons. During windy nights, the wind, invading our joint through the holes of the fragmented building, brought to our ears the moaning of the children crushed under the rubble and the screams of desperation of their fathers and mothers that penetrated into our brains and burned our imagination white. Thousands of sticking out chimneys appeared to us like tombstones. In the middle of September, we were forced to limit our

“nutrition” to one meal per 24 hours. We couldn’t extract any products from anywhere because the tunnel we used to get to Szymek Kac’s shelter had been demolished by the Germans. Our efforts to enter the doctors’ shelter yielded no results. Around September 18, when there was still no reply from the window of Rudy Jozek, we decided to force them to contact us. These were our last desperate attempts to get help from outside. We threw a stone at the window breaking the pane, but instead of some reply, we heard an uproar of shots, flashes of rockets, and a tumult of grenades along Swietojska Street that fell in the brush-makers district. Dragging ourselves like some shadows we returned to the joint. While passing Walowa Street we noticed from afar flames and clouds of smoke coming out of the residence in Walowa 10. We thought that it was a shelter with corpses burning. But when we came closer, we realized that it was actually the shelter where Mellon’s parents were hiding. You couldn’t go inside, and there was no one to ask how it happened that the shelter was found out, and it remained a mystery where the Germans shot these new victims.

That day at the joint, the hunger death was approaching. We had just a bit of beans left, but we didn’t have anything to make fire to cook it. We ran out of the stones in the lighters to start fire. During the day we sucked on the rests of skins left after the lard that we now retrieved like a treasure from the rubble where we had disposed of them before. These skins were very dry to begin with and dried out, and their hardness resembled shoe soles, but now when we were eating them, they seemed like a delicacy. However, they were not able to stop the hunger. For a few days there was no rain, and so we didn’t even have water. We used up all the water from the dishes lying around in the courtyards within our reach. These dishes were totally dry. A good observer could figure out, according to the placement of these dishes, that somewhere in the proximate vicinity of the dishes there were people hiding.

The hunger blurred our consciousness and brought on apathy. Day and night the hunger was sucking and squeezing our empty stomachs like a wretched pushy beggar as if it were demanding from us mercy and alms. The thirst was even worse, and it was taking a toll on us. In the daytime the sun was burning, and in the night the wind was covering our mouths and eyes with mountains of dust and rubble, and our tongues were sticking to the roofs of the mouths because of our dried-out throats. Night after night we trudged around the courtyards in search of water. Walking in single file in the dark, we were touching the contents of every dish lying around.

## September 1943

On September 20, we lucked out because we found a can with some liquid in it. Reacting by instinct, I grabbed the can, put it to my mouth, and started drinking. The liquid was flowing with a blissful stream down my insides, but after a second it began to horribly burn my inside organs. In the meantime, my companions tried to rip the can out of my hand. But to their disappointment I fell down to the ground and the can slipped out of my hand spilling out the precious and much sought-after liquid. The comrades figured out that it was phenol<sup>126</sup> (phenol fumes escaped from the can that stayed opened over a long time as it has been lying in the courtyard since the time of the first July action). Starowiejski and Szerszen kept their presence of mind, pulled me inside the rubble of the burned down house, and ran off to look for some water. After several hours, they returned with a pail of water that they managed to take from our previous joint in Nalewki 23-25 where in the meantime enough water poured in (the Germans usually turned the dishes with water upside down, but they didn't notice this one).

The next night, I stayed at the joint, while my companions, who were outside in the territory, couldn't get out of the courtyard at Zamehofa 13 because the German patrol was walking along that street that night while at the corner of Zamehofa and Gesia there was another patrol observing the area that stayed there till the morning hours. We never ventured beyond Pawia Street because the security guarding Pawiak was even stricter, and the streets were lit with a reflector. On their way back to the joint, my companions started snooping around the cellars of the burned-down houses. In one of the cellars, they managed to find a bit of rancid barley that we chew raw. After they brought the barley at night, it started raining. We all left the joint and lined up many dishes under not fully burned gutters and in various places where the water was dripping down the walls. This way we managed to catch a few buckets of water and decided to use it for cooking the rancid barley. Next night (September 22) we dug out some stones out of the cobblestone pavement, and we wanted to start a fire. We got some

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<sup>126</sup> A mildly acidic toxic white crystalline solid obtained from coal tar and used in chemical manufacture and in dilute form as disinfectant.

sparkles by using the stones, but we didn't have any flammable material to get the fire really going. On September 23, we had an idea to use the lenses from the flashlights. When the sun was shining, we used the lenses to fire up our "cigarettes." From the smoldering cigarettes we got pieces of paper burning and then a piece of wood. All day long we guarded the fire so that it would remain small and wouldn't get out from the chimney or other openings and so that it wouldn't get extinguished. We believed that in this way we would be able to preserve it as eternal fire. A day later on September 24, a strong detonation shook our joint, and the falling-down rubble choked our eternal fire on which we were still able to cook the barley the night before. We made a decision about again sending out two people so that they could get in touch with other people. This time it was Abram Atarowiejski and Lewinson's turn (it's in the diary – they never returned).



## ARYAN SIDE

On the Aryan side the first thing that drew our attention were the salesmen of obwarzanki.<sup>127</sup> “Obwarzanki” it is a typical Jewish product that up to now was baked and sold in the Jewish neighborhood. It turns out that the Poles can adjust to our demand and make the same delicacies, as did the Jews themselves. Only the typical Jewish salesmen are missing. Despite the rain and the time being late there was still traffic in the streets. People were returning from theaters and movie theaters. Pedestrians were rushing home to make it on time before the closing of the gates. The life on this side of the wall continued unchanged. People already forgot about the tragedy of the ghetto and were not used to being around Jews anymore. I made it to the store right before it closed, and for the first time since six months I bought fresh bread and vodka. In the cellar at Twarda 5 we drank the first shot to our escape and being saved or rather being able to only escape the cemetery. The first happy moment in our beginning life on the other side was when we bit into the fresh bread. That night nobody slept or even dozed off. We couldn’t believe it that we actually managed to get out of from the bottom of hell. And our thoughts were frantically considering the future.

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<sup>127</sup> Obwarzanki (plural) or obwarzanek (singular) is a braided ring-shaped bread that is boiled, sprinkled with either salt, poppy seeds, or sesame seeds, and then baked (similarly to bagels). It is the most popular and inexpensive snack sold from street carts only in Krakow [translator’s note: it is quite surprising to read about obwarzanki being sold in Warsaw since it is a local specialty restricted only to Krakow; it could be that these were a different type of obwarzanki]. Etymologically the term “obwarzanek” goes back to the verb “parboil.” The earliest reference to obwarzanki being baked in Krakow appears in the accounts of the court of King Vladislaus Jagiello and Queen Hedwig dated March 2, 1394. See Izabela Czaja and Marcin Gadocha, *Obwarzanek krakowski: historia, tradycja, symbolika* [*Obwarzanek Krakowski: History, Tradition, Symbolism*]. Kraków: Bartosz Głowacki, 2008 and Maria Balinska, *The Bagel: The Surprising History of a Modest Bread*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2008.

Throughout the night we heard the patrols along Twarda Street pacing to and fro. But we also heard doorbells of those privileged Poles returning home. All night long it was raining, and it didn't stop even in the morning. At 5 am (curfew in the Aryan district) we decided with Szerszen to go to Mokotow,<sup>128</sup> where our Polish friends lived, in hopes to get some advice, help, and most importantly to get some money that we didn't have. On this side in the "paradise" it turned out that the only practical and at the same time necessary thing was to have money. Zemsza stayed in the cellar together with Czarnoczapka, who was supposed to during the day buy some food for them both because he was the lucky one to have "good appearance," Aryan. The so-called, "good Aryan appearance" was absolutely necessary since it enabled you to move about in the "paradise." Szerszen i Zemszow were the typical representatives of Semitic race. Zemszow, she had pitch-black hair, sad Jewish eyes, a long nose, and a freckled face. Similarly Szerszen had pitch-black hair, black stiff facial hair, a hooked nose, and a bit bulging eyes. Our clothing wasn't rags, but it wasn't normal working-class clothing that Polish worker wore. Our first concern was to get our hands on some clothing that would make us look like those people we saw in the Polish neighborhood. On "this side" it turned out that I possess an invaluable treasure, that is, "good Aryan looks." Thus, it fell to me to escort Szerszen to Mokotow to his Polish friends.

While crossing the Twarda Street towards Zelazna, we noticed paramilitary guards that still patrolled the former Toebeens shop that was in this part of town. The whole property was burned down. On our way, when we got to 6<sup>th</sup> August Street, we were approached by two Poles that asked us, "where is this Jew coming from, where is he going, and whether he has money?" When our reply was negative, they told us, to get out of this street because this is where the military barracks were. Because it was still early during the day, we went to Mokotow Field<sup>129</sup> where we decided to rest lying down till the afternoon hours. After two hours of staying in the park, a farmer who was collecting potatoes there came over to us and started to

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<sup>128</sup> District of Warsaw

<sup>129</sup> Pole Mokotowskie (Polish for "Mokotów Field" is a park in Warsaw located between Warsaw's Mokotów district and the city center. It is one of the largest parks in Warsaw.

interrogate Szerszen again on the subject of his Jewishness, but this farmer was a “decent” person. From his further explanations it became clear that there was a Jewish-worker outpost at his place, and one of those workers owed him 3,000 zlotys. The farmer told us he vowed that he would collect this debt from the first encountered Jew. Szerszen explained to him that only yesterday we were able to get out of the ghetto, and when his Polish friend brings in the evening a few hundred zlotys that he will share that money with the farmer. The farmer forbade Szerszen to move away from the field till he gets the debt money. At noon I went to see a manufacturer in Odyniec Street who had a business connection with my parents (Mrs. J.M.). That person upon seeing me crossed herself, and the first time during my stay here she welcomed me in her kitchen. She asked in detail about my family and my siblings; she was whispering to me because she claimed that in the whole house (of which she was the owner) the SS soldiers and paramilitary troops live. In her own apartment, a priest was quartered by the Germans, and she didn’t trust him. It seemed that it was just unsafe for me to be at her house. In order to emphasize the danger I’m in when staying there, Mrs. J.M. said that she had a higher rank in A.K. thus her house was under constant surveillance. When I proposed that I would use her cellar for a few days to rest, and after a few days I will be gone because in the meantime I would arrange for joining the partisans, Mrs. J.M. replied that her cellars have glass doors, which makes it impossible. As far as the partisans were concerned, she started politely making it clear to me that these were bandits and because of my parents’ memory I shouldn’t join them. After two hours of discussion with Mrs. J.M. I succeeded in getting some sports pants (that belonged to a cousin but were stored at her place) and 1,200 zlotys. My family stored with her the furs that, as Mrs. J.M. claimed, before the ghetto uprising were picked up by a Pole to whom my family had gave the authorization to do so. I wanted to add that the money I got from her wasn’t a form of help but rather a settlement of sorts because my family and my parents had many business dealings with her so that she was supposed to have a much larger sum of money belonging to my family; however, she explained that she had no money because the factory (screws, nuts, and rivets) wasn’t doing well since it worked for the Germans only, and the warehouse located in Warsaw (that was run by family till the day of the ghetto sealing) was all empty due to no new shipments. The profit from the house in Odyniec Street was minimal and barely satisfied demands so as to pay taxes. From what she was saying, it looked like I needed to be working

for her and helping her out. But when I asked her to employ me in the factory, she countered that the director was German.

After the conversation with Mrs. J.M., I had an introduction to the paradise. From her mouth came out only the words of falsehood, hypocrisy, and lies. Her feelings were only good for business. Once the business stopped, her feelings stopped too, and any relationship with the Jewish friends was forgotten. When I was leaving the apartment, Mrs. J.M. asked me to leave in such a way so as not to be noticed by the doorman. I left that house of Pharisees in disgust promising myself that I would never return there. Half an hour later I called Oppel. When Captain Miller answered the phone, I literally lost my voice. I was just standing there as if spellbound without being able to articulate one single word. I asked the Captain to meet me in Zoliborz<sup>130</sup> that evening. He replied that he'll be happy to meet me, but he needed to know who was calling. I couldn't give him my name over the phone since I was calling from one of the stores so that I was trying to communicate this information by saying that I was one of the workers from Oppel, the former co-worker from the warehouse. I told him that I got sick in April, and I had been sick since then that is why we couldn't see each other. But all of my explanations were not enough to let him know who I was so that finally the Captain demanded to know my name or he wouldn't meet with me. Suddenly it occurred to me that I used to use in our group at Oppel an alias Janek, and so I said to the Captain that it was Janek speaking. Yet, he couldn't remember that name. Finally, however, he gave in to my pleas and entreaties and arranged a meeting at the square of Inwalidow<sup>131</sup> at 7 pm. I bought a bag of food and returned to the field where Szerszen was left. The farmer wasn't there. We tried to escape quietly and hide somewhere else before the dusk because Szerszen with his face couldn't move about during the daylight. However, the farmer found us, and after a long bargaining accepted graciously 500 zlotys.

After dusk, I escorted Szerszen to Pulaska Street where he was hoping to get some clothing and money from his Polish friends. As far as the money was concerned, Szerszen had some money with him. When the farmer was blackmailing us, Szerszen told me about a certain sum of dollars he had but was afraid to lose. So he really wanted to get rid of that farmer. I arranged

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<sup>130</sup> One of the northern districts of the city of Warsaw

<sup>131</sup> Square in Zoliborz district of Warsaw

with Szerszen that if were able to stay with his friends, he would then wait till I have everything lined up for us to join the partisans. If, however, he were unable to stay with his friends, he would return to the cellar in Twarda 5.

When I arrived at the square of Invalidow, the Captain was waiting for me. I wanted to jump up with great joy and run to him, but he just winked at me and showed me with the movement of his head to follow him. He took me to the Vistula River and we hid in the shrubs. In there we were able to greet each other warmly, and the Captain told me that he would have expected any other person from our group at Oppel, but never me. I was known in his house from his stories and already mourned, and the companions from Oppel (till the day of their deportation) were embittered that after my entering the ghetto, fighting erupted and they supposed I surely perished. I told the Captain about those days. I found out about the fate of my Jewish work companions. In the evening the Captain took me to his apartment in Zoliborz, Krasinskiego 18. There I took a bath and got from him new underwear. I took off the old lice-infested clothing, he gave me a jacket, and after the supper I had to leave his apartment because he was already hiding two Jews, two brothers from Lwow, one doctor and the other engineer. The engineer, after leaving Warsaw, was recognized as a Jew and killed in a camp while the doctor lives and is the chief doctor UNRA in Belgium and keeps in touch with Captain Miller.

## 1943

The Captain promised me that starting tomorrow (September 28, 1943), he will do everything possible within his power to help our group. I arranged with the Captain that we would meet at the same spot the next day. For the night I returned to the cellar in Twarda 5. Till the curfew, Szerszen didn't return from Mokotow. It meant that he stayed with his friends. Zemszowa told me that Czarnoczapka went to a hairdresser during the day where he met one of his Polish acquaintances from his hometown who promised to take him along under the condition that Czarnoczapka would will to him the house left after his parents. Czarnoczapka returned to the cellar to say goodbye to Zemszowa and in the evening left Warsaw. He was in a rush to leave the cellar because the kids going back home after school stopped here to play. Czarnoczapka was very much afraid the kids would report to the Germans that there were people hiding in the cellar.

Had the Germans discovered our hiding place, we would have been done for. But the instinct of survival was stronger and was chasing people away from the new danger so they could hide better. The life in the Polish neighborhood was ruled by coincidences. To daily occurrences belonged blackmailing the Jews that was practiced even by school children. In that cellar, only two of us remained, and when I told Zemsz about getting into contact with the Captain, she found hope anew but suggested that that we move to the cellars in the Grzybowski Square 16 because the children won't enter those cellars in the burned-down houses around that courtyard. Next day I bought food for Zemsz to last her all day, and then I took a tram to Mokotow where I was just hanging around the park Orlicz Dreher waiting for the evening to come so that I could receive heartening news from the Captain. At noontime I heard the wail of sirens of armored paramilitary cars, and the whole square, including the park where I was, got surrounded by the Germans. They were conducting a roundup and checking identification papers of everyone entering the houses in that area. It was impossible to break through the encirclement. I was trapped and suddenly felt like an animal locked in a cage that the Germans will take away in a moment. I got my gun ready, which I held in the windbreaker under the jacket, and started walking around in the park waiting in suspense for the further development. I was reliving my own imaginary death perhaps for the thousandth time. In front of my eyes, like in a kaleidoscope, the images from my past were moving.

Suddenly I noticed on the nearby playfield in the park a group of children and young people playing soccer. I offered that I would referee for them. A tall guy asked me whether I could play. When I said yes, he offered me to play in the striker's position. Straining my will to the maximum, I started running on the field while sneaking glances toward the military police near the park. I was playing like that for several minutes when the police entered the park and started checking identification papers and approached us on the field where we played. The police watched our game for a bit and after some time left.

After about half an hour, the boys got bored of the game and decided to go home for dinner, but the blockade wasn't finished. I managed to convince a few of them to play some more till the Germans were gone. After the game I hid in the shrubs and rested till the evening. In the evening I couldn't even walk to the tram. My legs were swollen, and my joints were in pain after all the strain. I walked on my legs like on stilts. Once I dragged myself to the place where I was supposed to meet the Captain, I felt like

quitting my new life in “paradise” on this side. The Captain was dedicated to assisting me from the first moment and was frantically looking into how to help me, Zemsz, and possibly Szerszen. From the conversation with him, I took away that at the moment it was virtually impossible to get transported and join the partisans at A.L., and being in A.K. resistance would mean certain death for a Jew. The Captain, as a human being, as a Pole, and as a radical socialist thought he had no right to put us at serious risk of death by sending us to insecure resistance because, he claimed, we were just a few of witnesses who survived, and who in the future will demonstrate to the world the naked bestiality of the Germans towards the Jews. The Captain promised that till he remains in Warsaw, he will protect us with his life. He was one of the most sincere, honest people, dedicated to the cause of saving the persecuted ones, and a man I just met during the occupation of Warsaw. From the first moments of getting to know me, Captain Miller had a very honest approach to the Jewish problem. During our meeting I found out that there at the moment there wasn't any place where we could get settled. The matter of resistance got still more complicated because A.L. was quite weak at that time as it was in the stage of getting organized. Captain Miller promised me that he will dedicate every bit of his free time to finding a place for us even for at least a month. And again the question of finances popped up because neither I, nor Captain Miller had available funds. I returned to the cellar, but the idea to move to the cellars in Grzybowski Square 16 met with failure because those cellars served as warehouses and were guarded. We spent in our cellar the whole night waiting for the dawn and news.

On Wednesday I decided to see the bank director, Przanowski, in Moniuszki Street 12. In my conversation with director Przanowski I found out that he turned the sum of money in foreign currency deposited by Prywes and Wislicki over to director G. in the first week of the uprising in the ghetto. Director G. came to him with some documents from abroad ordered for those families, and he requested the deposited money. Director Przanowski warned me not to come to the bank because it was under the German surveillance, and I could get arrested there. I never received even a penny from director Przanowski.

That day I went also to Grojecka Street to my Polish acquaintances who gave me 1,000 or 1,500 zlotys, but I didn't get a place to settle in. All days and nights I wandered around in squares and fields on the outskirts of Warsaw switching the location every day. In Warsaw where I was born I felt at that time like an abandoned stray dog. In a city of over 1.5 million

inhabitants there was no room for fugitive persecuted Jews. Most of my acquaintances became cold and distant towards me in the face of the tragedy of the Jewish people. The only expected help could only come from the Captain. But it wasn't easy for him either. Among all his friends and acquaintances, he couldn't find even one place for a person of Jewish background. The days dragged themselves without changes and any perspectives for a change. I bought myself a worker's uniform and dressed in it I wandered around during the day, and during the night I was back at the cellar.

On Thursday I went in the direction of Wola (September 29) in order to wander around there all day long and then return to the place where I could get news from Captain Miller. At noontime I entered a cheap restaurant in Wolska Street close to Młynarska (behind the hospital ...) in order to get some inexpensive meal. Suddenly while I was eating, there were shots in the vicinity of the hospital and the house where the restaurant was bordering on the hospital. The whole area was suddenly surrounded by troops and the military police that cordoned it off with additional help from the secret and grenade police. All the neighboring buildings were blocked off so nobody could leave. Sitting at the restaurant, I stopped eating, and all the Poles who were there (many of them workers) were asking the owner of the restaurant whether there was some secret exit or a cellar where you could hide. I also got to hear the reply that there was only one exit and no cellar. The Poles, not thinking for very long, opened the door and left, trying to get back to their places of work. I saw that one of the secret agents and a grenade policeman standing close to the restaurant let them through and wanted to see the identification papers of only one of them. I decided that I would do the same. I approached the grenade policeman who wanted to stop me to see my ID (I think because of my young age). I showed him that I worked across the street and my identification papers were left in my jacket. I'm not sure if he believed me, but he ordered me to get away fast. I jumped into a passing by tram and went to the edge of Wola where I sat till the evening. At dusk when I took the tram back to the city, I found out that the resistance was getting back their wounded comrades from the hospital and during the action some of them got wounded. Passing in the tram near this hospital I saw many patrols checking identification papers of the passers-by and carrying out searches in local businesses.

In Żoliborz I found out straight from the Captain's mouth that he had a place in sight for us, but for now I still needed to go back to the cellars



today. In the evening Zemsz told me that during the day some kids saw her in the cellar and got interested in her, but she pretended to be mute; however, she was close to a nervous breakdown, and when she heard that it was taking longer to find a new hideout, she decided to go to a watchman at Grzybowski Square 13 thinking that she could hide there. I escorted her over there, and this is where she stayed. In March or April 1944, in one of the newspapers of the new "Kurier Warszawski," I discovered her picture, and under the picture was a description of how there was a body of a murdered woman found in the rubble of the house in Krochmalna Street. It stated that her underwear had seals from the hospital (from Czyste hospital). Till today I don't know the circumstances of her death. The next day almost the whole city of Warsaw was subject to a roundup. In the evening I was unable to get through to Zoliborz and couldn't contact Captain Miller. I returned alone to the cellars, and at night I resolved that I would go to Kampinos Forest<sup>132</sup> on my own accord on Saturday in order to join the resistance. On Saturday I went to Mokotow where I was hanging out till noon, and later I went to Zoliborz wanting to see Captain Miller before leaving Warsaw.

In the evening, the Captain took me to Bielany<sup>133</sup> where he found a promised place to stay for 3,000 zlotys. But once we arrived there, the owner changed her mind and didn't want to accept a Jew. It was late, and I couldn't return to Warsaw any longer because the curfew for Polish people started at 9 pm. I decided to spend the night in the fields of Bielany. But the Captain suggested we both try to stay at his friend's house in Bielany. After 9 pm we found ourselves in Chelmszyska Street, and the Captain went into a one-family house number 88, from which he quickly returned beaming and had good news that the friend agreed to us spending a night. I went into the house whose owner introduced himself as Szczypiorski, and after several minutes of conversation I saw that he was a remarkably sensitive good man, and responsive to the suffering of others. After a few hours of staying at his house, I received instructions that just in case his wife, who was out of town,

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<sup>132</sup> A large forest complex located in Masovian Voivodeship, west of Warsaw in Poland. It covers a part of the ancient valley of the Vistula basin, between the Vistula and the Bzura rivers.

<sup>133</sup> Bielany is a district in the north-western part of the city of Warsaw.

comes back I need to say that I'm his cousin who came to Warsaw from Ozarow for a medical treatment. This was the first place in the occupied Warsaw where I experienced the true family warmth from the first moments of my stay there. I was supposed to spend only one night there and the next day at dusk (it was Sunday) I was supposed to return to my cellar. All day long Mr. Szczypiorski was showing me genuine kindness, and at dusk when Captain Miller arrived, Mr. Szczypiorski told him that after all that had happened in my life, he considers it to be his holy obligation to keep me at his place. Captain Miller was happy that finally he was able to place me. During the first days, I stayed in bed pretending to be sick, which wasn't too difficult, and when Mrs. Szczypiorski returned she believed our fabricated story. The days of blissful peace had begun, but they were not to last very long. When I rested a bit, I resolved to write down all my experiences, re-living them in a form of a diary. The needed materials, that is, pencils, notebooks, and a calendar were provided by the Captain. I also had the shreds of my notes from the ghetto and all the memories still fresh in my mind. When I started writing, the memories and impressions began pouring in with such intensity that I wasn't able to catch up with writing all of it down. I was so immersed in my work that I didn't even come down to take meals. But the people around me were so kindhearted and so eager to help that they only were trying to help me and distracted me from work only so that I wouldn't get sick from it. Mrs. Teofila didn't know at that time what I was writing. I was so preoccupied with my work that I was unable to stop and was working long into the night. Mrs. Szczypiorski warned me that I shouldn't work at night because the light can be seen outside in the street and this can call attention to our house. The conditions in that house were excellent because it was a one-family house, and my room was upstairs where no strangers would enter. Mr. Szczypiorski brought from work (he was a senior cashier at a box office and now is the director of the Municipal Transport Company in Warsaw; before the war he was a member of the communist party) the distributed anti-Semitic literature issued by the propaganda office. I left the propaganda publications out on the desk on purpose just in case someone unwanted were to enter my room; my diary was hidden underneath. Each notebook I finished writing was buried in the cellar, but first protected from the moisture. In this peaceful environment, I lived and wrote till the middle of October 1943. In the middle of October, we heard that the whole city of Warsaw will be under a blockade for the purpose of finding the remaining Jews. At that time, substantial paramilitary troops

blocked off Bielany, including our street. Stefanek (Szczypiorski's son) came home out of breath to tell me that I should run away into the fields. He didn't know I was Jewish, but he wanted to protect me as his cousin because on such "occasions" Polish youth was at risk, especially those who didn't have proper identification papers.

I came out to the backyard, but it looked like the whole area was guarded, and it was impossible to get through the German barrier. I stayed in my room and secretly observed what was going on in the street. I noticed that from the upstairs room of the house vis-à-vis us that belonged to the family Kaczmarek (he was a tram conductor) three young men were peeking. At the first glance I knew they were Jewish. My inkling was confirmed when the family Kaczmarek suddenly left locking the house and the gate. After a minute Mrs. Teofila came up to me and told me to get my identification papers ready because the Germans are making the rounds in the houses. I told Mrs. Teofila that her husband took my documents to town in order to get me registered at the employment office and so I don't have anything to identify myself with. Mrs. Teofila told me to go to the garden and hide under the redcurrant bushes. At that moment, we heard a loud persistent doorbell ringing and right after that the sound of rattle butts hitting the door. Mrs. Teofila ran downstairs to open the door, and I within a second decided to hide in one of the small attic rooms. I checked it out before and knew that there is a niche there not readily visible. In order to get into the niche, you had to crawl on all fours on the 6-meter long floor of the attic. Standing in the niche I knew that this time it was my end. I heard the steps and the voices of the Germans looking through the attics in the neighboring houses. After a while I heard the conversation between the military police and Mrs. Szczypiorska as they requested to see her documents and asked her whether there are any men in this house. Mrs. Teofila replied with a no. The police started the search looking into a wardrobe downstairs, inside the beds, the cellar, the bathroom, the garden, and then they started climbing the steps upstairs to the room occupied by me. They looked through the covers on the bed. They looked inside the two small attic rooms attached to the staircase then they yanked open the little door leading to the attic where I was hiding, and two policemen entered the area where you could stand up and from where you would need to crawl to the niche where I was hiding. They lit up the flashlight and looked around but didn't notice the niche. One of them

yelled: "Hier niemand da."<sup>134</sup> He got, however, interested in the empty bottles lying around since he wanted to find some wine. After a while the policemen left the attic and stopped in the room where a gramophone in a wooden box was. One of them asked Mrs. Szczypiorska to put a record on because they wanted to listen to music. I heard her reply that the instrument was kaput.<sup>135</sup> When they left, I heard a thump of a falling down body. After half an hour I decided to leave my hiding place. In the room, Mrs. Szczypiorska was lying on the floor since she fainted, and her son Stefanek that just returned was trying to revive her. This woman changed so that it was hard to recognize her as she was totally white, her eyes were scared, and her whole body was shaking from fear. The military police stayed in Bielandy till the evening. They took a few dozen of people, for instance, in Szretera Street they found a young married couple so they took them together with the owners of the apartment in which they were hiding; they were taken to Pawiak never to return. Was it because of a coincidence or an omission, I'm not sure, but the police never entered the house of Kaczmarek (Mrs. Szczypiorska said that they were mad because those Jews never visited with them later).

In the evening Mr. Aleksander came home from work all agitated because he thought I was one of those Jews that had been taken away, and a tragedy had happened in his own house. He was ready to faint when he saw from afar that there were no lights lit in his house. Mrs. Szczypiorska was afraid to have any lights on, and Mr. Szczypiorski was convinced that the darkness meant that everyone was taken away by the military police. It was a short-lived happiness of Mr. Aleksander after he found out that everyone is alive. Mrs. Tola created a huge scene and threatened him that she would take the kids and leave if I don't leave the house (most likely she guessed I was a Jew). Mrs. Aleksander, however, didn't give in and wanted to keep me there. The argument was going on for a few days. At that time I found in one of the attics a small opening that wasn't bricked up that was located above the door leading to the garden. The opening created a sharp angle between the roof and the ceiling. This is where I decided to hide till the day of getting

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<sup>134</sup> There's nobody here.

<sup>135</sup> Broken

my Kennkarte.<sup>136</sup> I used this hiding place a few times even when I already had my Aryan documents. I used it in February, 1944 when in Chelminska Street at midnight the A.K. fighters attacked a few merchants. Mr. Szczypiorski bought wooden planks, hinges, deadbolts, and cement. We made a trapdoor that was fasten to the roof, and I was able to lower it and lock it when inside. The trapdoor was on the ceiling of the attic and the cement covering it was merged with the cement of the ceiling. During searches, Stefanek, who now knew I was a Jew, put some wood over the trapdoor, empty bottles, and other junk to mask it and to obstruct the access to it.

## 1944

I was hiding in there during the Easter time of 1944 when the execution squad of A.K. pulled up in front of one of the houses in which women offering sexual services to the Gestapo soldiers lived. The squad shot dead four women and two German officers that were visiting with them. In a blink of an eye, Bielany were cordoned off, but even this time my hiding place proved to be perfect. As a disciplinary measure, that day 150 men were taken away from Bielany to be shot.

About a month later the whole city of Warsaw was electrified, in a bad sense, as a few armored cars were stolen from the German shop in Walicow Street. The Germans kept searching through the whole Warsaw area and one day arrived in Bielany and started to close off the district, check people's documents, and search for the parts of the stolen cars. About 250 meters away from our house in one of the streets there was a shed (before the war, coal was sold there). The shed looked abandoned and forgotten. Nobody was interested in it because it was always locked. A few policemen approached it and wanted to get inside to check for the stolen parts. The massive locks and reinforcing bars didn't scare them away as they started to hit the door with the rifle butts. At this moment, you could hear several detonations coming from the inside of the shed, and a few Germans were blown to bits. In that shed, the A.K. men were hiding one of the stolen

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<sup>136</sup> Basic identity document used in the occupied territories during the Third Reich era. It was first introduced in July 1938.

armored cars. Inside they also installed a specially constructed time bomb connected to the lock. The car, the shed, and the Germans were torn into pieces and thrown into space of several meters. In the neighboring houses, the windowpanes broke. The consequences of this incident came fast. Higher-rank officers came to Bieleany, and the whole area looked like the front itself. The searches were conducted non-stop for 24 hours. The Germans didn't let pass anyone, not men, not women, not children. Everyone needed to show their documents. From Bielany 100 new hostages were taken to be shot. In my hiding place (the opening was about 1 meter deep, 80 cm wide, and 60 cm long) I lay for 24 hours, my figure bent into four parts, with little air access, and my tired tormented body was without any nourishment.

During the time when it was peaceful I kept writing my diary till May 1944. I wrote and hid 16 notebooks. Several times we had visits from young Kowarski (his father was the manager of Orbis travel agency in Nalewki Street – a Jew) who was hiding in Warsaw and knew Mrs. Szczypiorski. Kowarski told him that he was using food assistance, but when I wanted to get into contact in order to get meals, Mrs. Szczypiorski and Captain Miller forbade me to do so because that might give away my hideout. The material means of the family during my stay at their home were sometimes bordering on tragic. We lived together supporting ourselves from their ration cards and a very modest income of Mr. Aleksander, and from time to time, Mrs. Szczypiorski went to Lubelskie to do some smuggling to supplement their income. When after a few searches my hiding place proved to be safe, the peace returned to the house, and these people showed me genuine humanitarian spirit and authentic attachment. In an era of Nazi bestiality, I found in the home of the Szczypiorski family warmth, and together with their son Stefan they treated me as a brother. I was able to stay in their house till the day of the uprising in the Aryan district.<sup>137</sup> On the day of the outbreak of the uprising I was in Bielany where I took part in fighting for the A.K. troops

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<sup>137</sup> The Warsaw Uprising of summer, 1944 was led by the Polish underground resistance, the Home Army (AK) and was the single largest military effort taken by any European resistance movement during World War II. The Red Army temporarily halted combat operations, enabling the Germans to regroup and defeat the Polish resistance and to raze the city in reprisal. The Uprising was fought for 63 days with little outside support.

(there was no A.L. in Bielany), and I stayed there till the uprising was suppressed in that part of the city.

After the uprising was crushed in Bielany, all the men went into hiding, and the Germans began anew house-to-house clearances and mass evictions. The horrid days of hiding began, and my hiding place became invaluable along with the help of Stefanek's brotherly attitude towards me. Mrs. Szczypiorski wasn't home because when the uprising started he was at work, and this is where he was fighting. On September 28, 1944 an order was given to evacuate all the inhabitants of Bielany. Everyone left the house but me. I decided to stay in Bielany because the Soviet Army was to be heard from Praga,<sup>138</sup> and the underground press P.P.R.<sup>139</sup> claimed that in a matter of days the Soviet Army will enter Warsaw.

In Bielany, the hospital of Red Cross was still left and full of wounded resistance fighters. There was also an orphanage filled with old and sick hiding Jews and some Poles that didn't follow German orders. In the beginning of September, 1944, large units of soldiers came to Bielany and were getting ready to take over the Warsaw uprising. Some officers knocked on our door. I, almost traditionally, went for my hideout, and I couldn't leave it any longer. In our house, troops of different formation needed to be accommodated. The soldiers were on the verge of starvation and even more corrupted and depraved. Right away after entering the house, they started searching every nook and cranny and found the masked entrance to my hideout with all the rubbish provided by Stefanek on its top. They started to pick up the empty bottles one by one, and I was holding my breath being convinced that they will start to rip up the hidden door to my hideout in a moment. After looking through all the empty bottles, the Germans left the

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<sup>138</sup> Praga is a district of Warsaw located on the east bank of the river Vistula. Vistula. First mentioned in 1432, until 1791 it formed a separate town with its own city charter.

<sup>139</sup> It was a form of dissident activity across in which individuals reproduced censored and underground publications by hand and passed the documents from reader to reader.

attic, yet, they stayed in the house. I spent the afternoon and the night in my hiding place.

The next morning I heard the Germans digging trenches in our garden and decided to leave my hideout and go inside the house. When Mrs. Szczypiorska and Stefanek noticed me, they at first became scared but then she decided to introduce me to the officers as the cousin of her husband who didn't make it home before the uprising started. The officers acknowledged it and weren't interested in me any longer. From the conversations with them, I found out that it was a detachment that was soon to be dispatched to seize the insurgent Warsaw. The soldiers were completely demoralized and undisciplined. One time Stefanek came running to me and declared that he stole grenades from the Germans and buried them in the garden (after liberation we dug them out). The soldiers were embittered that they were being sent to fight the resistance where they will die for sure. They said that the communists who got there from Praga fight in Warsaw, and that from every corner comes death because the Soviet air-force and katjusze<sup>140</sup> fire at the German positions in Warsaw. All day long, the soldiers walked through the houses and robbed food and all kinds of alcohol that they helped themselves to. From looking at these soldiers, you could tell that the German army was deteriorating and unfit to fight. After three days of their stay at our house, these soldiers were sent to fight in Warsaw. At the end of September, an ordinance was passed to evacuate all the civilians living in Bielany. On this stretch the Germans were preparing the line of defense. Close by lived dr. Jankowski who didn't want to leave Bielany just like some other families and decided to organize a Red Cross hospital in his house. On that same day a gossip started making the rounds in Bielany that all young men in hiding went to dr. Jankowski's "hospital" to obtain asylum. I also went to that "hospital." It was a 3-story building occupied by young Poles and, as far as I was able to establish, by a few dozen Jews. In the rooms there were beds with temperature charts and annotations about the illness. The house was fully filled with people hiding so that the management spread mattresses in the attic that was soon full, too. Every person hiding received from dr.

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<sup>140</sup> The Katyusha multiple rocket launcher is a type of rocket artillery first built and fielded by the Soviet Union in World War II to deliver explosives to a target area more quickly than conventional artillery. They are inexpensive, easy to produce, and usable on any chassis.



Jankowski an appropriately allotted illness with specific instructions how they were supposed to simulate in case when the Germans come. The windows of all rooms were made half dark, and in the evening no lights were turned on. The Germans that came were always welcome by dr. Jankowski (or Janczewski) who, so it appears to me, compensated them accordingly so they wouldn't touch the "hospital." At this "hospital" I made an acquaintance of a pleasant lawyer and the brother engineer (both of them live) originally from Bielsko. Those who were hiding couldn't leave the "hospital." The news from the outside were brought by the pastor from Bielany. On October 5, the pastor came to my bed and told me that the Germans demolished a house and set on the coal on fire, and that they are taking all their things which points to the evacuation of Bielany. I wanted to share this joyful news with my acquaintances so I ran up to them and said, "Mr. priest just now shared some news with me ..." At this moment the lawyer interrupted my cheerful talk, took me aside, and told me directly that I'm a Jew. When I attacked him verbally telling him that he was a blackmailer because I had flawless national past at the Szczypiorski, my acquaintance the lawyer told me not be stubborn about the truth because he is also ex nostris.<sup>141</sup> Right away I calmed down. He told me he realized I was a Jew because I said, "Mr. priest."

We decided we needed to stick together and together leave Bielany. The next day an order came to evacuate all communal institutions from Bielany. Dr. Janczewski managed to force the Germans into the allotment of several ambulances to transport all the "sick" to Pruszkowo. The lawyer's brother-in-law (who owns some land in Bielany, originally from Austria, signed the Volksliste in order to save his wife and her family), bribed a German officer with 20 dollars in gold who let him have an ambulance at his disposal that he used for transporting his whole family and several Jews, including me. This Jewish transport was particularly guarded by the officer who was bribed and thus afraid of a setback and his being exposed. Just before the camp in Pruszkowo, the camp guard stopped the ambulance, but the officer told the guard that he was transporting heavy-wounded sick directly to the hospital. It was the only ambulance from the whole transport that was directed to Tworki where the passengers got off. At the station in

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<sup>141</sup> From our people.

Tworcki some Jews were right away harassed by szmalcowniki,<sup>142</sup> who were forced to let their victims be because the brother-in-law of the lawyer, the Volksdeutsch, protected them. All the people went their way and the lawyer with his brother, son, and me went to Zacisze<sup>143</sup> in order to find a place for the night. We stayed with the Marciniak family. They were well-known drunkards in the vicinity of Pruszkow. I had no more means to sustain myself, but with the Marciniak family lived a young couple, Wroblewski, very friendly ... Jews, with whom I got acquainted. Mr. Wroblewski worked in Tworcki as a technician on the maintenance of various technical gadgets. When I disclosed my grave financial situation to him (We didn't talk about sensitive matters, but we understood each other well. His family was taken away in Pruszkow – four people.), he promised to find a job for me in Tworcki. At this time, Governor-General, Frank,<sup>144</sup> issued an ordinance to organize a unit for the prevention of typhus,<sup>145</sup> which was spreading through the lice-infested inhabitants of Warsaw. A few days later, I received a handbook on chemistry and first aid and had to study these subjects in order to pass exams and be hired by the disinfection ward. Each day I was sitting tight and cramming

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<sup>142</sup> Szmalcowniki is a pejorative Polish slang expression that was used during World War II for a person who blackmailed Jews who were in hiding, or who blackmailed Poles who protected Jews during the German occupation. The term originated in the German word Schmalz meaning "lard." The Polish Secret State considered szmalcownictwo an act of collaboration with the occupying Germans, and the Home Army (Armia Krajowa) punished it with death as a criminal act of treason.

<sup>143</sup> Suburb of Warsaw

<sup>144</sup> Hans Frank was Nazi Germany's chief jurist in the occupied Poland "General Government" territory. At the Nuremberg trials, he was found guilty of war crimes and crimes against humanity and was executed.

<sup>145</sup> Typhus, also known as typhus fever, is caused by specific types of bacterial infection. Epidemic typhus is spread by body lice, scrub typhus is spread by chiggers, and murine typhus is spread by fleas. Common symptoms include fever, headache, and a rash.

different chemical formulas after a 5-year break from learning until one day the military police came and took me to the Pruszkow camp as a “Warschauer Bandit.”<sup>146</sup> From there, a paramedic helped me to escape. She was Jewish and a contact A.K. between Zoliborz and Bielany, code name Myszk<sup>147</sup>(She moved here from the Lublin area.). After 8 days of studying I passed the needed exam. The doctor that examined me was Jewish, and I was firmly convinced about it. I passed the exam and received my ID and an armband. I took part in an 8-day training in the disinfection chamber. The ID and the red armband with the Hackenkreuz<sup>148</sup>were precious. The Poles regarded me as a Volksdeutsch, and the Germans as a “loyal” Pole.

The roundups of the inhabitants of Warsaw were going on unceasingly. At that time I met a very friendly young fiddler that played at the Marciniaks parties and was a sergeant in the underground army. His name was Edward Blach and came from a family of railroad men. He told me to visit with the mayor of Brwinow who can provide me with an ID with a registration dated back. That mayor was a Volksdeutsch. During the July evacuation of the Warsaw district he was retreating with the Germans that mistreated him and robbed him of all his possessions. Thus when he returned to his home area and took up his old job, he wanted to redeem himself in the eyes of his Polish neighbors. From him I received an attestation that I am a permanent resident of Erwinow, and that I lost my Kennkard;<sup>149</sup> consequently this present ID is valid till I receive the new document. This document in conjunction with the armband and the official papers from the Office of Typhus Prevention protected me fully from any roundups and allowed me to move about freely in the Pruszkow district. I was still living and eating at the house of the Marciniaks on credit. The lawyer, together with his brother and son, were forced to leave their apartment because Mrs. Marciniak, the drunkard, guesstimated the situation.

At the end of October, the whole department of the Office of Typhus Prevention was sent to the abandoned Warsaw in order to evacuate the

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<sup>146</sup> Warsaw brigand

<sup>147</sup> Mouse

<sup>148</sup> Swastika

<sup>149</sup> ID

former Municipal Institute of Hygiene in Chocimska Street. In that institute we worked under the supervision of Polish doctors. We packed into boxes serum and other ingredients for vaccinations as well as the vaccinations themselves, shots, and other medical products produced by the institute. We disassembled electric coolers, heaters, and other equipment that was sent together with the laboratory of prof. Heirschfeld to Wroclaw. Many a time, I worked there under fire of the Soviet artillery, but this job's good side was that I was assigned to disassemble the coolers. In these coolers, many valuable shots and medications were kept. After two days of work, a Polish doctor approached me and asked me to pack half of the medications for him into a box and hide it, and the other half for the Germans. Following the example of the doctor and his inventory, I divided the booty between three parcels. When I brought the specialties to Pruszkow, it turned out they were very valuable. This enterprise made it possible for me to pay the debt back to the Marciniaks and be able to make a living. The work even enabled me to save some money. Before I got this job at the Office of Typhus Prevention, in order to avoid roundups in Pruszkow I used to go with an army unit, several dozen Poles, and my friend Edward Blach to Warsaw where we were hired to dismantle the machinery at the Municipal Transport Company in Mlynarska Street. On the first day of our arrival during dinner when we were busy with looting in one of the workshops, we met a hairy unkempt man with Semitic features, who told us he was hiding close by with several dozen people. He asked us to bring them food and in exchange he would give us clothing. At the sight of this man, I imagined as if he were my double back in my ghetto days. Next day, together with Blach we brought him a few loaves of bread, a bit of lard, and sugar; since that day on we were bringing them food in secret from the Polish workers. I pressured Edward to ask the same price from those people as we paid in Pruszkow. Bringing potatoes to them proved a difficult task because the Polish workers were surprised that we bring sacks to work. We told them that instead of dinner, we'll bake us some potatoes. Indeed we baked a part of the potatoes, and we gave the rest to the people in hiding. We didn't give ourselves away because the Polish workers got drunk while eating dinner and went looting. We used those moments to give the products we brought to the Jew who was already waiting. This way we supplied these people while working there for several days. I met that person in Pruszkow in December that same year, and he told me that they were forced to leave the hideout and at night flee beyond the border of Warsaw because they had no food left and right next to their spot the Germans were

fortifying barricades in preparation for a battle for Warsaw. I was doing the work on the evacuation of the Municipal Institute of Hygiene till the day when they found me out.

At the end of December, I arrived at work in Chocimska Street and right after I got out of the car, Bahnsturmführer NSDAP<sup>150</sup> (Volksdeutsch) Koziol from Wroclaw (He was in charge of the evacuation to Wroclaw). When I entered the empty room to which I was summoned, awaiting me were Koziol, a German doctor (the former director of P.Z.H.),<sup>151</sup> and a Polish boss in charge of the Human Resources Department of the Municipal Institute of Hygiene in Tworki. Koziol addressed me with a question whether I was a Jew. While keeping cool head, I replied to him with a no, and that the co-workers from Pruszwow know me and my family. But Koziol wasn't beating around the bush, but took out his gun and examined me, which convinced him that indeed I was a Jew. I tried to explain that my father was Polish and only my mother was Jewish. Koziol was unrelenting and after a short exchange with the German doctor they decided to hand me over after work to the German guard at the end of Wolska Street. Thereafter Koziol started interrogating me about my family. Randomly I gave him Grodziska Street claiming that I live there too and asked him to bring me there so that the whole situation can be cleared up. Koziol was furious that a Jew infiltrated his department and was hitting my head with the gun butt telling me that I will get a bullet later. After half an hour he let me out of his room and addressed Polish workers working nearby speaking in Polish: "You will witness today how this little Jew will be smashed." I left this room staggering and not knowing what to do next because Koziol didn't want me to work, but rather to sit outside and wait till everybody finishes work so that when leaving Warsaw he could hand me over to the military police. He knew full well that there was no escape from the courtyard, and there's no place to hide in Warsaw. In the vicinity of my

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<sup>150</sup> Railway Assault Leader

<sup>151</sup> P.Z.H. was established in 1918 and is the national public health institute appointed by the Polish Ministry of Health to act in different areas of preventive medicine. Its activities relate to epidemiology of communicable and chronic diseases, food safety, environmental health, and health promotion.

workplace, that is, in the Unia Lubelska Square near Pulawska Street there is a checkpoint through which nobody is able to enter Warsaw without being checked. The same patrols were stationed in Pulawska Street near Odyniec and in Szuch Avenue; furthermore, all cross streets were closed off with barbed-wire benches.

Near us a line of trenches and fortifications ran that constituted the resistance point of German army on the Vistula River. All over Warsaw, the military police paced and executed every civilian that wasn't working or marching in line under the German escort. I went out into the courtyard, and the faces of the workers changed into either admiration for this Jew or indifference. Only some of them said, "It's a pity about this guy, but we cannot do anything because you cannot plead with Koziol." When I was in the courtyard, I noticed from afar my landlord Marciniak who arrived at work that day. When he heard that I am a Jew, he ran to his work and never showed his face again. However, Mr. Wroblewski and Edward Blach approached me. I asked Edward to bring me my coat because I was cold, and when Edward went to get it, I asked Wroblewski to show me where the spade and to begin to pack the things brought out from the building. When the opportunity arose, I escaped to the cellar where I found the spade and got outside through the back exit to Chocimska Street along which I went with the spade on my back hiding every so often in the gateways towards Lubelski Square. I planned to crawl under the barb-wire benches in order to pass by the guards and this way reach the railway station Warszawa Zachodnia<sup>152</sup> from and to which Poles came that worked on trenches in Warsaw. I managed to crawl under the benches, but when got to the Unia Lubelska Square, the police asked me how I got there and where I was going. I showed them my documents (that Koziol forgot to take away from me) and told them that about half an hour ago all the workers went home and forgot to take me. To prove it to them, I gave them the car number of the car that brought us to work (the number of the car that had to pass through this checkpoint about half an hour ago towards Warsaw). Looking for the right answer, I remembered that one car left with a cargo to the freight station where all the stolen property from P.Z.H. was loaded onto the trains. I knew also that the police guarding the exits from Warsaw note all the car numbers passing through. The police checked the number and when it was confirmed, they told me to march on.

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<sup>152</sup> Warsaw West

I entered Polna Street trying to get to the railway station through side streets. When I distanced myself about 200 meters from the guard post, I noticed a car returning from the freight station to P.Z.H. I decided to hide in one of the empty houses and wait there about two hours because I knew that the guards must change at that time, and I was afraid that they might find me.

After two hours I decided to march on. The streets were empty and the noise of my shoes created an echo that was carrying on the noise within a 50-meter radius. The streets of Warsaw appeared at that time as if a small ghetto from August 1942 when it became empty after all the Jews were taken away. In 6<sup>th</sup> August Street, I was held up by a patrol and needed to show my documents and essentially told them the same story. On the certificate from the Office of Typhus Prevention was written that all the civil and military authorities were asked to give help to the worker while he was carrying out his official duties. This certificate with such content and the seal with swastika had a particular magical influence. I passed through and after a few hours of wandering through the streets of Warsaw, I finally got to the station. At the station there was no inspection because there were thousands of workers getting back from work in the freight wagons to Pruszkow where they lived. At the station, the only form of ID was the spade.

Having arrived in Pruszkow, I could no longer go to the Marciniaks because I knew that in that drunkard family my stay is no longer possible. However, at the Office of Typhus Prevention my place of residence was different. Before the curfew, I snuck up to the house of the Wroblewskis wanting to ask Mr. Wroblewski about the reaction of Koziol to my escape. Wroblewski and his wife were already mourning my demise. They were so joyful when they saw me as if they were my parents. Wroblewski warned me and told me to run away from Pruszkow right away because Marciniak told Koziol that I live here and any minute now they can come to look for me. I took my savings that I was keeping safe in the house of Mr. Wroblewski and took the last electric tram to Grodzisko. I was wandering through Grodzisko for a few hours, and finally I saw that I wouldn't last much longer in the frosty conditions at night, and in the morning I escaped to Milanowek in order to find a place there. However, I didn't feel safe in Milanowek, and in the evening I was back in Pruszkow.

Once there, I tracked down Edward and asked him for help in finding a place to stay. Edward clearly believed that my father was a Pole and my mother a Jew, and that I am plainly an innocent victim. Edward brought me

to his family where I was supposed to live for a few days. After two days of being with Edward's family, I was standing on shaking ground again because in Pruszkow a gossip began to circulate that three young Jews escaped from TZh, and the Office of Typhus Prevention will give a high prize for their denunciation. Edward informed me that the office shows my picture to everyone who wishes to catch me.

## 1945

In the first days of January (1945), Edward suggested that I should go to their apartment where I could lie in bed for a few days because he told his mother that he brought a sick friend. In Edward's apartment I sat for days secluded so that nobody could see me, and I decided to use my Warsaw ID again and hide my other documents.

After a few days in Zbikowku (one of the neighborhoods in Pruszkow) in Cicha Street 9 (the apartment of Edward's parents), I heard the voice of the contact Myszka coming from the kitchen. Myszka sold accessories in order to support herself. She told me I needed to leave here. I asked her to advise me where I should go. Myszka then told me that she is in the process of organizing an action to get across the Vistula River to the Soviet side. She promised me that when she gets her passage (there were carriers who took people in their boats to the other side), she'll put me into contact with the appropriate people so that I could get to the Soviet side.

In the meantime Pruszkow was electrified with the news of an incident in Piastow (this is where the hospital of Child Jesus was evacuated to) where several Jews were hiding that a nurse denounced; consequently, the Germans shot them dead on the spot. This incident distracted everyone from my escape, and Edward's mother let me stay a few more days.

On January 15, the Germans blew up the power plant, which meant that the Soviet offensive would begin any hour now. The next morning, the Germans evacuated Pruszkow camp (located in the former mechanical shops of the railway company), and the Germans started to rapidly and haphazardly leave the town. The following morning, I heard shouts in the courtyard: "finally free without the Germans." In the streets, I saw the victorious tanks of the Red Army with smiling young officers. That day I took Edward's bike and rode to Bielany to dig out my diary that I hid in the garden of the family Szczypiorski before leaving their house. I was able to recover the diary fully and unharmed thanks to the protective cover.



In the evening, I was celebrating together with the lawyer, engineer, and other Jews that were saved in Pruszkow; there were about 700 people. After the moments of being joyful, sadness came that we were the only ones that survived, without our families, those close and dear to us. Loneliness and emptiness overcame us. And the question emerged: “what’s next?”

After the liberation, I found out from the doorman in Odyniec that Szerszen fought in Mokotow during the uprising and was killed in Pulawska Street.

## My Family

From the very beginning since the eruption of the war, all kinds of calamities befell my family. In September 1939 my oldest brother was drafted to join the army and sent to a distant border outpost near Prussia. This circumstance was the first massive experience for my parents, especially for my mom. My mom was exceptionally sensitive and had a true Jewish heart. From her, a typically Jewish wisdom emanated, and she was deeply attached to her children. My brother’s draft to the military service was the first stab in her heart. Then the moment came when on the radio, President Starzyński<sup>153</sup> gave an order to all men to leave Warsaw. My mom, a person of delicate constitution that suffered from a heart disease often, endured this hardship bravely, and she herself told my father and me to leave home and

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<sup>153</sup> Stefan Bronisław Starzyński was a Polish statesman, economist, military officer, and Mayor of Warsaw before and during the Siege of 1939. After the Germans entered the city on September 28, 1939, Starzyński was allowed to continue his service as the president of Warsaw. At the same time he became one of the organizers of Służba Zwycięstwu Polski, the first underground organization in occupied Poland that eventually became the Armia Krajowa. Among other things he provided it with thousands of clean forms of ID cards, birth registry forms, and passports. Those documents were later used in validation of false identities of many members of the resistance. On October 27, 1939 he was arrested by the Gestapo and imprisoned in the Pawiak prison. He refused an organized escape claiming that it would be too costly to those involved in his escape.

go towards Lublin. My mother thought that she, her sister – because they were women – and her youngest brother were not in danger, but we, men, should get out of the hands of Germans. My mother knew about the Germans a lot because her sister had lived in Berlin with her family since 1936. My aunt, who lived through all the German maltreatments, lost her entire possessions and was saved thanks to her American family that took her in. The experiences of the family from Germany were our first warning. In the meantime, the luck was on our side at least for a little bit as we found our older brother; however, he didn't stay with us for long. The roads to Lublin were buried under corpses and under the constant German fire. All the wells along the way ran out of water. My father felt guilty that, for the first time ever he can remember, he left the mom, the sister, and the brother alone. Seeing all the encompassing tragedy unfolding before his eyes, the father decided we should go back to Warsaw.

On September 16, 1939, there was a battle for Otwock, a place to which where we arrived. On that day, the Germans round up all the men at the railway station and conducted a selection, taking all the young men. During that selection, my brother (who wore civilian clothes because his unit fell apart) was detained, and when my father asked the German officers why they wanted to keep him, they replied that he's needed to clear up the corpses and can go home after a few days.

After the Germans occupied Warsaw, we returned home. Days and weeks were passing, but the brother didn't return. I cannot begin to describe the desperation of my mother who thought every moment that my brother was coming. When the period of roundups started, I, together with my younger brother, run our store, and the father was hiding all day long because he didn't want to shave his beard and looking quite Semitic he was too conspicuous for all the Germans. We lived relatively peacefully till the day the Warsaw ghetto was established. In the meantime, my mother inquired all the time about my brother's fate at the Polish Red Cross. She also got in touch with the International Red Cross in Switzerland and the family in America in whom she confided about the disappearance of my brother and asked them to take all the possible steps in order to find him. During the eviction to the ghetto, we managed "luckily" to get a small room as an alternative for our two-room apartment and the store, however, we left our entire furniture in the old apartment. We were able to take some merchandise from the store; besides that we didn't make any other

preparations because it was said that we would be able to leave the ghetto in order to work in our store.

In January 1940, my brother's friend from Eastern Prussia returned from Stalag 2 a<sup>154</sup> and told us that my brother was coming back with him, but he was taken to the train straight form a hospital. That transport was supposed to go directly to the region of Lublin where an exchange of prisoners of war between the Soviet and German authorities was supposed to take place. On the way there, several people died, among them my brother Izak. The friend said that those bodies were given to the Jewish community in Lodz where they were buried. It was the first blow that, with its full force, hit our family, especially the mother. After a few weeks in the ghetto, all Jewish owners of corporations and businesses on the Aryan side were summoned and told that they could go to their stores in order to get their merchandise. The owners of businesses located in the Arian section were assigned to precincts and taken to their corresponding location where they were forced to give up the keys to their establishments. Our material foundation was slipping away from us. In the first year of the ghetto, we lived on the money from the merchandise we had brought from our store and from catching small jobs. At the end of 1940, I understood that I needed to take over my father's place. Thanks to my good looks, I was able to go to the Aryan neighborhood and get into contact with Polish companies and do business with them till the day on which the ghetto was sealed off. I used to deliver these articles to them that my father ordered from his acquainted manufacturers at the ghetto. I managed to establish my own transfer point with the help of the workers, from the company of Konrad Jarnuszkiewicz, and they transported the merchandise to the assigned by me point at which they collected the money for it. This was we were able to support ourselves till Spring 1941.

Every time, my mother went to town, she returned with a broken heart and pains since she couldn't bear the sight of people starving in the streets. That Spring, my mother became really sick, and the doctors advised to send her to Otwocko immediately otherwise her life would be in danger.

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<sup>154</sup> Stalag was a term used for prisoner-of-war camps. Stalag is a contraction of "Stammlager" short for Kriegsgefangenen-Mannschafts-Stammlager (prisoner-of-war team and base camp).

The youngest brother who had a perfect Aryan appearance took the mother with me to the family in Wiedzieszyn. The little brother stayed with the mother, and I returned to Warsaw because the father alone wouldn't have been able to maintain the business contact since it was necessary to visit the Aryan district from time to time.

I used to leave the ghetto since 1940 because Haszomer Hacair sent me with literature to the ghetto in Falenice and Otwock where I had contacts. The organization used my frequent departures till the day when another tragedy happened in the family. My dear father who was an exceptionally healthy person contracted typhus. My sister and I tried to save him, and in order to do that we sold everything we had, but the illness put an end to his young life. During the next weeks when I went to visit my mom, I never mentioned the death of my father. But his silence finally seemed strange to her, and when she found out about this tragedy, in the course of one night, she turned gray. With the death of the father, the light of wisdom, warmth, and specific Jewish humor in our home became extinguished. Our all-embracing moral and physical support was gone. It was a blow from which we couldn't recuperate even after many long months, as we didn't want to believe that the life of this honorable man with the heart of an angel stopped beating. But the life forced us forward, and we decided to take even better care of our mother. In order to facilitate this, her sister came to stay with my mother after a lot of effort and money spent toward the authorization for transfer. Her state of health improved after spending some time outside, and the siblings did their best to make her forget the tragedies. I met with my younger brother quite often in the Aryan neighborhood in Warsaw, and he often came to the ghetto (1941) because his perfect Aryan looks made it possible. I doubled my energy at work as if working also for the father because I didn't want my family to suffer starvation. Till the day of the July action, I managed the business in such a way that we actually didn't go hungry. Only from time to time it was getting more difficult when the earnings weren't as much as needed. My mom, sister, and the younger brother, who always commuted, were all the time in Miedzeszyn. I always went to visit my mom.



That year in spring, my uncle Sewek Alterhand, my mom's brother, contracted typhus and died at 37 after a few weeks. His wife and two children were left alone. In 1940, my little brother got caught and taken to a labor camp in the vicinity of Lublin to Cieszanow near Belzec. Regardless of his young age, we was held up because he was a well-built, tall boy. The first

letter we received from him was a simple, "S.O.S. help me, because I will die in this camp any day now." A few times, we sent through a Volksdeutsch some food and money to him, but we weren't able to get him out of there. After a four-week stay, he managed to run away and get to Kazimierz on the Vistula River where he found help and care of the local Jews. He came home swollen from hunger and was all injured from the blows he had received from the Germans. Many weeks he was hiding with the family in Warsaw. After this occurrence, the father decided not to have us registered at the employment office. When my mom moved to Miedzeszyn, my brother got registered in Warsaw and I in Miedzeszyn. This way we were partially protected from the roundups. In Warsaw when people were trying to register themselves not with ghetto documents, the Jewish Police let them go because they treated such people as smugglers into the ghetto and honored such documents. Only shortly before the July action, I needed to register in the employment office to get a permission to work. When in July the action started, I wanted to get through to my mother wanting to be with her and my siblings in those difficult times. At the beginning of the action, I called on the phone every day, and my mother told me that where they were it was very peaceful and told me to get out of the Warsaw ghetto. When it was no longer possible to talk to the ghetto in Miedzeszyn, the contact between us was interrupted. From that day on, my mom couldn't find a peaceful moment. She was constantly thinking about me who was left alone in those horrible days. I, being hounded and chased after, never forgot about my family. When at Oppel, I managed to ask one of the Polish workers to communicate a message to my mom that I am still alive and in Warsaw, and I will try to get through to her.

In the beginning of September, I found out about the tragedy in the ghetto in Miedzeszyn. But till the day of liberation, I didn't have exact news about the fate of my family. Right after the liberation, I went to see the director of the school in Miedzeszyn, Pekala, whom I knew. He told me that my mother together with her sister and brother, and his wife and children, were loaded into trains and taken to Treblinka. The day before action in the Miedzeszyn ghetto, my mom agreed to let the little brother escape from the ghetto, who together with his friends got hold of weapons and during the next several weeks spent time in the Karczewski woods, where they were hiding and fighting off the Germans and the Poles. In April 1943, that group was broken up, and my brother together with his friend came to Miedzeszyn wanting to hide among the acquaintances. They were recognized by the


grenade police and handed over to the Germans who shot them dead in the neighboring woods. Till today, I haven't been able to locate the exact spot of the execution in order to have his body exhumed.



<b>YAD VASHEM</b> THE HOLOCAUST MARTYRS' AND HEROES' REMEMBRANCE AUTHORITY HAR HAZIKARON, JERUSALEM	 <b>יד ושם</b> רשות'הזיכרון לשואה ולגבורה הר הזיכרון, ירושלים
ירושלים, יח' כחזון חט"ח 13 בנובמבר 1984	
לכבוד מר א. נייברג רחוב רבידור 16/1 תל-אביב 69 982	
א.נ., הנדון: הגב' וגרה פילר - פולין (326)	
הודעה לבירור חסידי אומות העולם בישיבת מיום 25.10.1984 החליטה להמליץ במני הקליטה פונדק בארה"ב להעניק עזרה כספית לאלמנתו של חסיד אומות העולם מסיפן - פילר הגב' וגרה פילר.	
 ד"ר מרדכי פלדואל מנהל מדור לחסידי אומות העולם	
מברקים: ירושלים. טל. 531202. 91034 ירושלים. JERUSALEM, P.O.B. 3477 ת"ד 3477 YAD VASHEM, CABLES: מברקים: ירושלים. טל. 531202. 91034 ירושלים. JERUSALEM, P.O.B. 3477 ת"ד 3477 YAD VASHEM, CABLES:	



## Yad Vashem 2

<b>YAD VASHEM</b> MARTYRS' AND HEROES' REMEMBRANCE AUTHORITY JERUSALEM		<b>יד ושם</b> רשות הזיכרון לשואה ולגבורה ירושלים
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29	ירושלים, כג' בסיון תשמ"א 25 ביוני 1981	
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	לכבוד מר לאון נייבברג רחוב רפידים 16/1 תל-אביב	
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ה ז מ נ ה


הננו מתכבדים בזה להזמין לטקס נשיקה עץ לכבוד  
חסידי אומות העולם מפולין

	(1) ש"י יורטקי אנטוניה ואלכסנדר	
	(2) מילר סטפן	

בו אשקו עץ על שמם כשרת חסידי אומות העולם.

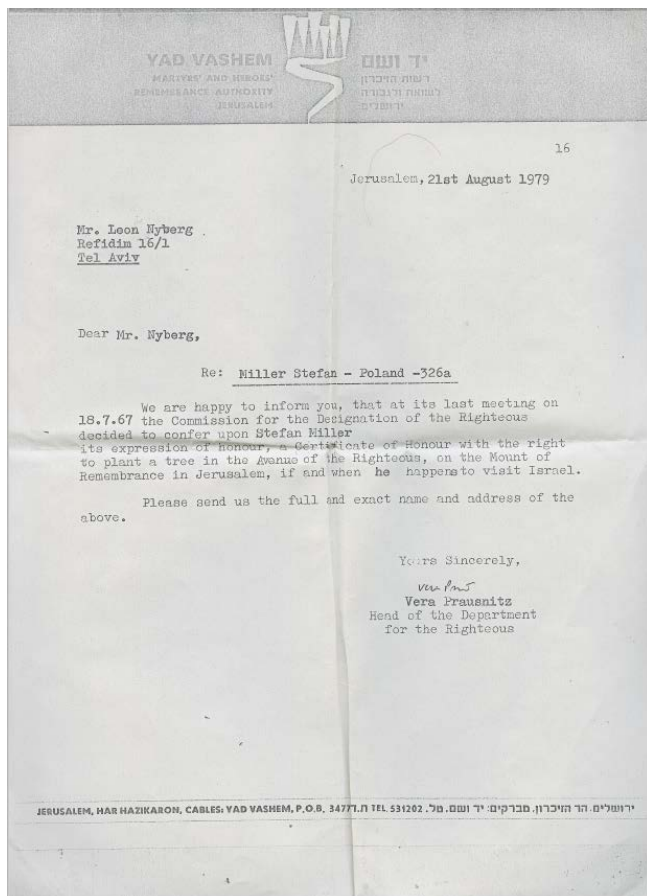
הטקס יתקיים ביום ב', יח' בתמוז תשמ"א - 20.7.81  
בשעה 11.00 לפנה"ב בדיוק, ב"יד ושם", הר הזכרון, ירושלים,

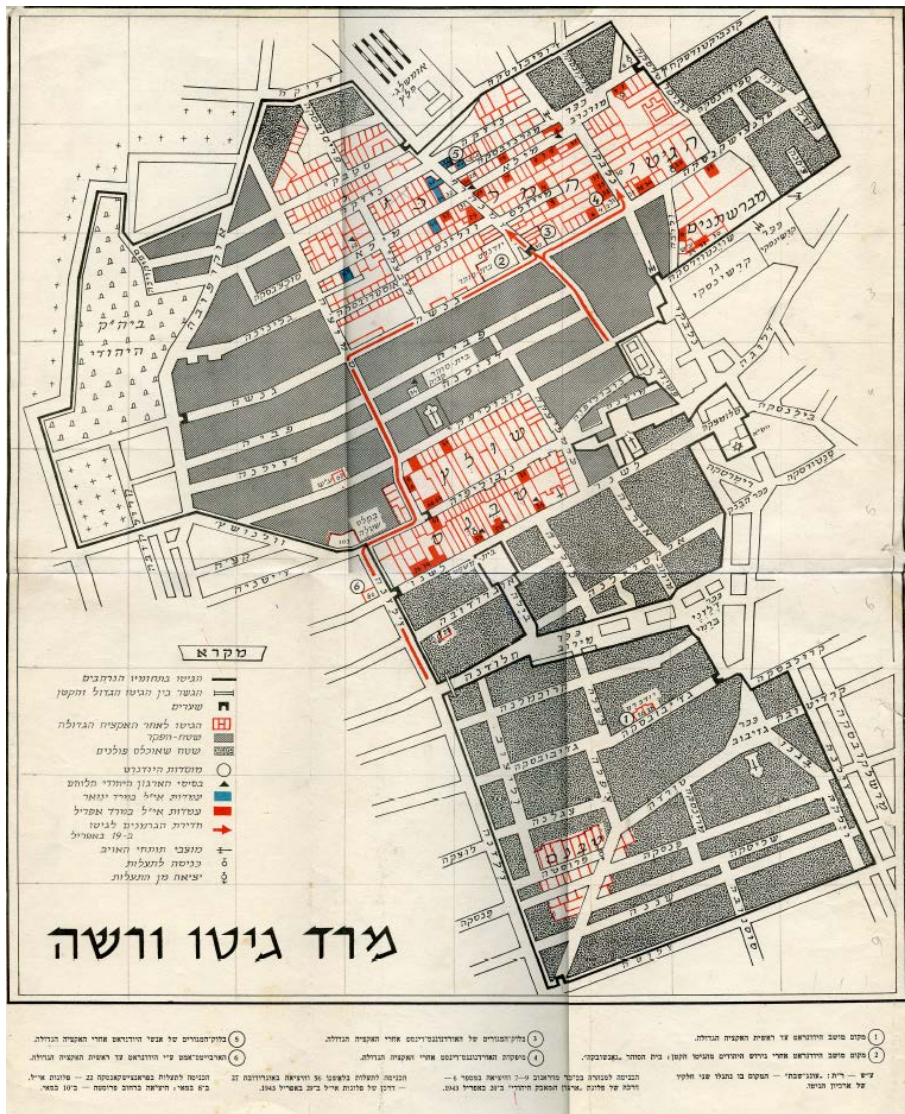
בכבוד רב,  
  
ד"ר / ורה פראוסניץ  
מנהלת טורר לחסידי אומות העולם

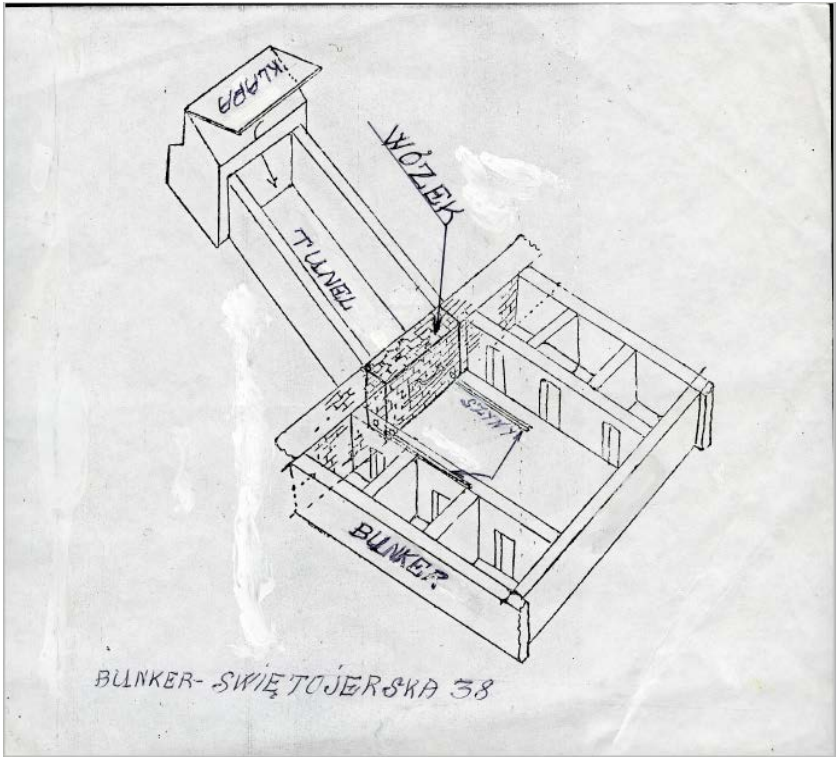
ירושלים. הר הזיכרון. מברקים: יד ושם. פל. 531202. ת"ד 3477 P.O.B. YAD VASHEM, CABLES: YAD VASHEM, JERUSALEM, HAR HAZIKARON.



# Gehtto Map



Bunker Illustration



# Letter from Polish PM

<b>1862</b> <small>LANDESGELDETRAI IN HESSEN, FRANKF. A. M.          DEUTSCHE BANK A. G., FRANKFURT A. MAIN          DISKONTO BANK A. G., FRANKFURT A. MAIN          COMMISSTRANK A. G., FRANKFURT A. MAIN          POSTSCHECKKTO. IN STUTTGARTEN</small>	<b>ADAM OPEL</b> <b>AKTIENGESELLSCHAFT</b> RUSSELSHEIM AM MAIN <u>Rechtsabteilung</u> 7. Dez. 1962	<b>1962</b> <small>TELEF. 4-1 237 OPEL RUSSEL          TELEGRAMME: OPEL RUSSELSHEIM          TELEF. 2000 FERNAMT. HESSEN (RUSSEL) 51          TELEF. 1988 NACHWACHSUNGSDIENST 6140-571          TELEF. 2001 DAVO AUF FACHSPRACHE 05143-37          FORTSEITZUNG 4993</small>
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Herrn  
 Leon Najberg  
 Tel-Aviv/Israel  
 Macoz-Aviv, Block 6/1

Betr.: Ihre Entschädigungsforderung.  
B.30

Sehr geehrter Herr Najberg!

Wir bestätigen den Eingang Ihres Schreibens vom 22.11.1962.

Unsere Ermittlungen haben ergeben, dass Sie während Ihres Aufenthalts und Ihrer Tätigkeit im K-Werk Warschau nicht Angehöriger unserer Firma waren.

Da mithin eine Rechtsgrundlage für die von Ihnen geltend gemachten Ansprüche auf Entschädigung für nichtgezahlten Arbeitslohn nicht gegeben ist, sehen wir uns leider gezwungen, Ihre Forderung ablehnen zu müssen.

Hochachtungsvoll  
 ADAM OPEL  
 Aktiengesellschaft  
 i.V.  
*F. H. Plaschnick*  
 F.H. Plaschnick

FHF/11

Vorstand: NELSON J. STOK (Vorsitz), GASTON A. de WOÛTE (Mitgl. Vorsitz), GUY D. BRUGES, GUINARD WINSTROM  
 stellvertretend: HEINRICH BARSCH, Dr. RUDOLF MOERNIGKE, LUDWIG KERP, ERST MEIS, HANS MEISHEIMER, Dr. JOSEF G. REHMANN, Dr. HANS SCHNAEL  
 Vorstand des Aufsichtsrates: SAR C. DAUM



Letter from PM Rabin



ראש הממשלה  
THE PRIME MINISTER

ירושלים, ד' באייר התשנ"ג  
25 באפריל 1993  
סימוכין: דש-4-881

מר אריה נייברג

נכבדי,

לכבוד הייתה לנו השתתפותך במסע לציון חמישים שנה למרד  
גיסו ורשה, פולין.

שותפותך ברגעים המרגשים הייתה חלק נכבד ביותר מהשליחות  
שעמסנו על כתפינו בצאתנו לפולין.

הואיל נא לקבל תודתי מעומק הלב.

יצחק רבין